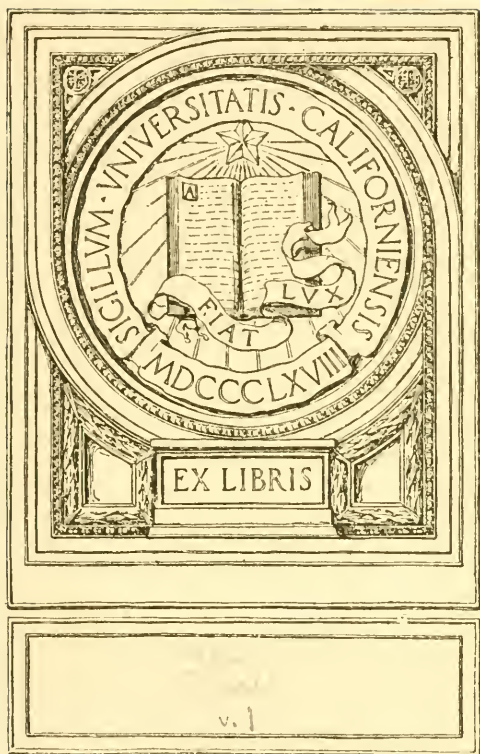


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Red Tales
Volume One
by
Harry Paine



COLLECTED TALES

IN REPARATION

COLLECTED TALES
VOLUME TWO

BY
BARRY PAIN



COLLECTED TALES
VOLUME ONE
BY BARRY PAIN

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DEAR MR. SECKER,

When you asked me to make a final collection from the short stories which I have published during the last five-and-twenty years, I accepted with, I fear, avidity. I was to select those stories which I thought to be the best and most characteristic; you were to publish them in two volumes, of which this is the first. It seemed to me that after twenty-five years a writer ought to be able to fill two volumes with work which, whatever its demerits, would at any rate be the best that he could do. But now I am in doubt.

The modesty of a preface is always and rightly discounted, but really it is difficult for an author to judge his own work. The temperamental appeal vitiates the critical estimate. The author remembers the origin of his story and the circumstances under which it was written—things of no concern or interest to the reader. In many ways he may fail in an author's most essential imaginative effort—the effort to put himself exactly in the place of an intelligent reader.

However, in the case of work which has already been published, an author can be guided in his

P R E F A C E

selection by published criticism. I have tried to avail myself of the help of the best criticism. And by the best criticism I mean, of course, that which is most acute in perception and quick in sympathy—not that which is most laudatory or most condemnatory.

In such a collection as this it is easier to account for omission than for inclusion. I have included none of my humorous stories—stories written solely with a humorous intention. In 1891 I received some letters from W. E. Henley in which he advised me to do no humorous work, with the exception of parody, but to devote myself to serious work. I thought then—and still think—that this advice was good, though I have not been able to follow it as closely as I should have wished. Certainly, though I do not want to be too portentous about it, I think my humorous work would be out of place in this collection.

Sincerely yours,

BARRY PAIN.

ARTS CLUB,

LONDON, W.

May 1, 1915.

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THE CELESTIAL GROCERY

A FANTASIA

It is precisely one year to-day since the incidents happened which I am going to record. Since that time I have been waiting for developments. But no developments have taken place. I find myself, in consequence, so completely at a loss what to do or what to think, that I venture to state the case plainly, and to ask for advice.

Thomas Pigge, my old college friend, had sent me a stall-ticket for the play. It was not often that I went to a theatre at all; and I had never sat in the stalls before. Pigge said in his letter that he had been meaning to come with me, but had been prevented by a sprained ankle. I found afterwards that this was quite untrue. Pigge, as a matter of fact, had bought the ticket by a mistake. He had been told that "The Dark Alley" was having a great success. About a week afterwards he saw the advertisement of "Fair Alice," and as his memory is notoriously weak, he confused the two plays, and ordered a ticket for the wrong one. Soon afterwards he discovered what he had done, and learning that "Fair Alice" was a dismal failure, he offered his ticket

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first to his aunt and then to his tailor, both of whom refused it. It was then—and only then—that he sent it on to me. I do not think this was very nice of Thomas Pigge. I half suspected something of the kind at the time, and I was careful to make the few words of thanks that I sent him rather cold. I do not suppose he noticed it.

When I had dressed for the evening, I rang the bell—partly to tell my landlady that she need not sit up for me, but also with the intention of letting her see that, although I lived in inexpensive lodgings, I was familiar with the mode of life of English gentlemen. She surveyed me admiringly, and asked me if I would like a flower for my button-hole. “No, thank you,” I said, with a smile: “they are not worn.” I noticed with pleasure that these few authoritative words had their proper effect. However, as I was walking down the Strand on my way to the theatre, I saw a man, in evening dress, who was wearing a rose in his coat, and thinking that it would be safe to follow his example, I spent sixpence on a gardenia with some maiden-hair. The circumstance would be trivial were it not for its bearing on after-events.

I cannot say that I enjoyed the piece altogether. The house was by no means full. The few young men in the stalls seemed mostly to know one another, and none of them knew me. The two who came in after me had those hats that shut up; mine was an ordinary silk hat that I had worn for a

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year. This fact served to make me feel more lonely. My fine sensibilities render me peculiarly liable to this sort of thing; but they also do me good service by making me notice for imitation slight shades in the manners of the best people, which those of a coarser mind entirely miss. For instance, I had observed that the habitués of the stalls generally look a little careless—not reckless precisely—but with an air of taking everything for granted. I copied this expression throughout the evening.

A man's surroundings have a great effect upon his character; I felt myself perceptibly refined by my presence in the stalls. My position as an under-master in a private school seemed unworthy of me. "It is not," so I thought, "the profession for a gentleman. I shall change it." I must have known perfectly well that it was impossible to change it; but it pleased me to say so to myself. My old tendencies towards economy vanished. I felt that I must have a cab to take me home. It would cost two shillings probably, but that would be better than an incongruity. My æsthetic principles positively forbade me to walk home after having sat in the stalls. So I hired a four-wheeler, as I always mistrust hansom. "After all," I said to myself as I put up the window, "what is money? We assign a value to it, but it is relative and transitory. We don't know what anything's really worth. What is money? What is money?" The words repeated themselves

over and over again, in time with the rattling of the cab, "What is money?" Such a repetition is liable to send one off to sleep. I am not sure that I might not have fallen into a doze myself, if I had not suddenly been startled into wakefulness by the stopping of the cab. I felt certain that the man could not have driven to my lodgings in the time, but I jumped out. To my amazement I found myself in an empty street. On one side of it ran a low stone wall, on the other there were houses; the darkness hid them to a great extent; but the house at which my cab had stopped was brightly lighted up, and appeared to be some kind of a shop. There was nothing set out in the windows, but over the door were the words "Joseph, Grocer." The street itself was paved with blocks of crystal, and in the air there sounded the wildest music. I turned to my cabby, utterly at a loss as to where I was, or why I was there. He sat absolutely motionless; his hands still held the reins, but his eyes were shut. "Now then, cabby!" I cried, "where have you taken me to?"

He made no answer, and gave no sign of having heard me; but the horse turned its head and looked at me. As it did so, the music ceased.

"You're starrin'," the horse remarked.

I remember perfectly well that one of the young men with the shut-up hats had made the same remark about some actress, and I had then wondered what he meant. "This

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is very confusing," I said. "It was the cabman that my remarks were addressed to."

"Look over that parapet," answered the horse.

I could not help thinking how extraordinary it was to hear a horse speak. All my life long I had been accustomed to regard a horse as a poor dumb animal. It might, of course, be all very well in fables to——

"Shut up!" shrieked the horse.

"I never said anything," I replied indignantly.

"No, but you thought."

"Well, I can't help thinking."

"Can't you? If you think like that again, I'll kick this cab to splinters. I was shod yesterday. Why can't you look over the parapet, and do as you're told?"

I gave in. I had an indistinct idea that I was going mad, but I walked carefully across the polished street, and leaned over the low stone wall. Certainly it was a marvellous and beautiful sight. Far down, as far as my eye could reach, there was darkness; and the darkness was strewn with myriad golden stars. I heard the horse's voice behind me: "The smallest of those is the world you've just left, and this is the world you've come to."

I knew perfectly well that this was impossible and quite unscientific, and as I leaned over the wall I formed my conclusions. I had been terribly overworked lately, and probably part of my brain had given way——

“Never had any!” yelled the horse, and went into a roar of unmannerly laughter.

I took no notice whatever of this, but went on thinking. These delusions must have arisen from some such partial failure of brain-power. It was to be hoped that it was only temporary. Probably rest and medical advice would soon set me up again. I would step across to the grocer’s, and inquire where the nearest doctor lived. As I crossed the street, I noticed that the horse was humming the National Anthem. I pushed open the door of the grocery and entered. There were counters and shelves, but nothing on them. After waiting a little while I ventured to tap on the floor with my foot. A voice from the other side of the counter said :

“What may we have the pleasure of doing for you?”

I looked, but I could not see any one, and I ventured to say so.

“No, you can’t see me. It doesn’t really matter, but I think I left it downstairs. James,” the voice called to some invisible person at the farther end of the shop, “what did I do with my body? I had it only this morning.”

The answer came in a boyish voice: “You left it in the cellar, Joseph, when you were packing up the nightmares.”

“So I did, so I did. You’re right, James.”

“But,” I said, “I can’t see James’s body either.”

“No, you see James has only got one.

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You're very inquisitive. If you must know, his body's gone to the wash. You wouldn't have him wear it dirty?"

"I generally wash my own," I said mildly.

"Well, we don't. This is a grocery, not a laundry."

"You must excuse me," I pleaded, "I'm quite a stranger in these parts." I saw it was no good to inquire for a doctor. If the grocery was part of the delusion, as it seemed to be, it would be absurd to make the inquiry there. If, on the other hand, the grocery really existed, then probably I did not require the doctor's services. But I felt very muddled about it. "I suppose you're Mr. Joseph?" I said.

"I am Joseph, and I should take it as a favour if you would tell me with what I can serve you."

"Well," I said, "judging from the state of your counter and shelves, I don't see anything you can serve me with."

"Of course you don't see," he answered a little snappishly. "You can't see the abstract. I'm not a grocer in the concrete. Kindly shut that door. There's a draught keeps coming down the back of the place where my neck would have been, and that's a thing I can't stand."

As I shut the door I felt more bewildered than ever. An abstract grocer was beyond me, and I said so. "What, for instance, is abstract sugar?" I asked.

"Sugar's concrete," was the reply, "and

if you abstract it, you get spanked. We've got no sugar here. If you'd like a Pure White, Crystallized, Disinterested Love, we keep that, although there's not much demand. They mostly use the coarser kinds. They say they're sweeter."

"Ah!" I cried, "you deal in abstract nouns then."

"That's more like it. It's a clumsy way of putting it, but it's fairly right. We supply, or, to speak more accurately, we groce, all the Emotions to the Solar System, and trade's very slack just now in that branch. We are doing rather better in States of Being, and we've just got a new assortment of Deaths. Now, once for all, do you intend to buy anything?"

I remembered with joy that I had a couple of sovereigns and some loose silver in my pocket. All my life long I had suffered from want of emotional experiences. I had always regretted the want of variety, the general flatness and dullness. If the delusion or reality—I neither knew nor cared now which it was—would only last, I was determined to gratify to the full my fine perceptions. Especially was I struck with the mention of the Pure White Love. I may confess at once that I never got on much with women. I have a natural dignity and reserve that is sometimes mistaken for nervousness. I fancy it sets women against me. Somehow I am never able to say to them quite what I want to say. I have often looked at a young girl,

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and thought that if she could only know me as I really was—if she could once regard me as apart from wretched circumstances, my poverty, my shabby clothes, my unfortunate reserve—she might abate something of her pretty scorn.

“Certainly, I intend to buy something,” I said. “To commence with, I should like to see some samples of that peculiar Love you mentioned.”

“Dear me!” broke in Mr. Joseph. “How many more times am I to tell you? You can’t *see* samples. You can feel them if you like. James!”

“Yes, Joseph,” answered the boyish voice from the further end of the shop.

“Let’s have some of the ‘Pure White,’ look sharp.”

“Right.”

“Now then,” continued Mr. Joseph. “Take that chair. Adopt an easy, natural position. Don’t cross the legs. If you find the light too strong, you can blink the eyes once or twice, it won’t make any difference. Head a little more this way. You’re frowning. That’s better. Now then, we’re ready. Steady, please.”

The light certainly was too strong. A sudden flash blinded me, and when I recovered my sight I was apparently no longer in the Grocery. I was in a dimly lighted conservatory and the middle of a sentence. I have never been able to find out what could have been the beginning of it.

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“ . . . which it is not, and never was,” I was saying. “I am content only to have told you, and now I relinquish you. Let this be my farewell, my good-bye to you before I sail from England. In books that we read, a man would have asked you for one clasp of the hands, or even one kiss, but I neither ask nor wish for that.”

I looked up, and saw the girl to whom I was speaking. I had certainly never seen her before, but yet the figure was familiar. She sat in her white dress, shaded from the light by some tropical plant. It was with passionate and hopeless adoration that I looked at her, and yet I was full of a strange content ; it seemed to be enough to have loved her. I saw that her head was slightly turned away from me, and that she was sobbing.

“I am sorry,” I went on, “that I have made you cry. I want you to be happy, and I know there is only one way.”

“I never knew it was going to be like this,” she said tremulously.

For the matter of that, neither had I when I first ordered the first sample pure white. But it struck me as being all quite natural. Some of that peace which must come to men of a great soul, had come to me.

“Good-bye,” I said. “I am not going to do anything desperate, anything that could cause you regret. It is enough for me to have loved you, and to feel that in comparison the rest of my life is one . . .”

Just as I had begun in the middle of a sen-

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tence so I ended in the middle of a sentence. The dim-lit conservatory and the maiden vanished, and I found myself once more in the Celestial Grocery.

"Do you like it?" asked Mr. Joseph's voice.

"Yes," I said hesitatingly, "it is grand, it is sublime. But I don't think I could stand very much of it. How much is it a pound?"

"We don't sell it by the pound; we sell it by the spasm."

"Then," I said, "I'll take six spasms."

"James, six of the pure white."

"Right," said the voice of James.

For a moment I tried to recall the beautiful girl in white whom I had just seen. I wondered how my first sentence began and how my last sentence would have ended. I seemed to have walked for a while upon those heights of love that reach beyond the fires of passion, and on which lie the snows of perpetual purity. I felt that my self-respect had considerably increased in consequence. Here I was interrupted by Mr. Joseph.

"What will be the next order?"

"I have often longed," I replied, "for a little real happiness."

"Yes," said Mr. Joseph. "But that is a blend. You buy the ingredients and you blend them yourself. Unfortunately, we do not provide Incomes. We have a Literary Fame which gives great satisfaction. 'Political Success' is in considerable demand. Then there's 'Religious Exaltation'—not much

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asked for lately, I'm afraid. 'Requited Love' is not expensive, but we've had complaints that it doesn't wear well. Of course there's Death by Drowning, Death by——"

"Stop, Mr. Joseph," I cried, "I have no desire to die." I had already decided what should be my next experiment; for even undermasters have their ambitions. "I think," I said, "that I should rather like to try the 'Political Success.'"

Mr. Joseph took my order with alacrity, and the same process as before was repeated. Once more I seemed to have left the grocery. I was standing on a balcony, my hat in my hand, and below me in the street there was a surging mass of people. As far as my sight could reach I could see eager, excited faces upturned. I was just concluding a speech, and, as before, was in the middle of a sentence.

"... not derogatory to the national sense—(cheers)—of what is the fittest, the truest, and the best way—(renewed applause)—of proving to those who at one time may have thought otherwise, that, in spite of all pre-conceived opinions, which, if they are not praiseworthy—and I do not say they are so—yet may with some show of justice—(hear, hear)—be asserted to have had their origin in a sentiment felt by humanity at large, and more especially by the English-speaking races, and to which we to-night, with the generosity of the conquerors towards the conquered—(loud cheers)—can well afford to extend our fullest indulgence. It is not only in the family

but in a man's public capacity ; not only by the fireside, but also beneath that fiercer light that beats upon the high offices of this nation—(loud and prolonged cheering)—not only with the . . .”

I would have given anything to have gone on a little further. I do not even know what my politics were, although I am inclined to form an opinion from internal evidences in my speech. But I never in all my life felt such a delightful sense of exhilaration, triumph, and power. When I came to, I found myself seated on the floor of the grocery, perspiring profusely.

“Oh, that was good,” I exclaimed, “very good !” I picked myself up, and inquired eagerly what the price was, and how it was sold.

“It is expensive,” said Mr. Joseph solemnly, “very expensive ; and we sell it in bursts.”

I did not like to ask for further details. I expected that Mr. Joseph would give me a reasonable amount of credit, and with the literary fame that I intended to buy I thought that I should soon be able to pay for everything. But I thought it wise to order only two bursts of the “Political Success.”

“Mr. Joseph,” I said, “I hardly know what to order next. I should like to have a price-list, and a week to think it over. I never bought anything abstract before. At present I've got only some ‘Disinterested Love’ and some ‘Political Success’ ; do you think you could let me have some Literary

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Fame, Musical Ability, Personal Charm, Popularity, and Contentment ? ”

“ It’s a large order,” said Mr. Joseph, “ but we will do our best to execute it. James, will you see about those articles ? ”

“ I will,” said James.

“ And when shall I have them ? ”

There was no answer.

“ I should like to know when I can have them,” I continued. “ I don’t want to hurry you. Any time in the course of a year would do. I can give you a reference if you like. The master of St. Cecilia’s knows all about me. But as I did not imagine I was coming here to-night, I have brought hardly any money with me. However, if you would not object to taking two pounds on account——”

I pulled out my two sovereigns, and laid them on the counter. As I did so I looked up. I had ceased to be capable of surprise, or I think I should have been surprised. Before me, on the other side of the counter, stood a young girl. Perhaps I should more accurately describe her as a young angel, except that she had no wings or halo. She was dressed in some loose, white garment, which looked like the apotheosis of a night-gown. I could not say within a year or two how old she was, but she seemed to be on the verge of womanhood. Her figure was tall and slight. Her small white hands were clasped before her. Her face was, perhaps, a little wan and pale, but full of the most spiritual beauty. The expression upon it was

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one of sweet, calm seriousness. Her eyes seemed to be looking sadly at something far off. Her hair was long and dark, and fell loosely about her shoulders. I gazed at her a long time before I could speak.

"Mr. Joseph?" I stammered out questioningly.

"Joseph and James," she said in a low musical voice, "have gone downstairs to feed Joseph's body. They sent me up here to wait on you. What are these?"

She took up the two sovereigns I had placed on the counter.

"A mere trifle," I said. "I thought that, perhaps, it would be better to pay a trifle on account. If I had known that I was coming here, I would have brought more—I would, indeed."

"Will you please put them away?" she said slowly. "They have no value. I will tell you about it soon. I have known you for a long time—known you so well."

I was entranced by her beauty, and could hardly find words to speak, but I muttered the usual commonplaces. It was very stupid of me, but I did not seem to recall her face. I did not even remember her name.

"No," she replied, "you have never seen me before. You will know my name one day, but not yet. I have watched you for years, and sometimes I have been with you. I am glad that you came here to-night, for I have often wished to speak with you."

It is possible that I may have looked a

little incredulous, for she fixed her eyes full upon mine, leaning across the counter, and whispered something to me. I do not see that I am called upon to write down what she said. It was quite personal and private. If I did record it, it would probably be misunderstood. But it answered its purpose. It made me feel that she knew me indeed, that here I had no impression to make and none to mar. There was no longer any barrier of reserve between us.

"And at last you have come to me," she said. "No one can overhear us; we are quite alone."

My cheeks were flushed and my voice trembled. "You do not talk," I said, "as the women I met on earth, nor as Joseph and James did. No earthly woman that I know would have whispered to me the things that you did."

"You are not angry with me for it?" she said.

I loved her for it, but I could not tell her so. For a moment or two I gazed at her in a kind of rapture. "You are very beautiful," I said at last.

"Yes; but that is not of any real consequence here. Here the body is always beautiful, because the spirit never spoils it. Would that I could alter your nature and make it like ours! But they told me that you would look at me as on your earth a man looks at a woman. I do not understand that. I do not know your way—ah, do not look at me so."

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"I cannot help it; you draw my eyes towards you."

"Do not say that!" she cried in a distressed voice. "Do not think of it. I can think, and speak, and love when I am not in the body. I almost wish that I had not come to you like this. If I had been only a voice I should still have desired you."

Like most people of a shy disposition, I have an occasional access of boldness. "Do you mean that you do not understand the kind of attraction that a woman has for a man? Do you not know what flushed cheeks, and longing looks, and trembling voice mean? And yet I could believe that the earthly love would be possible to you."

"The lower is always possible for the higher," she said. "But that is not what I want. I long to-night to teach you the other love. But now that I am face to face with you I have no words. There are none in any language that will tell you. I want names for things of which you know nothing—things which with men and women of your world do not exist. I should feel no shame in speaking to you of it, for there is no shame in our love. Your love is full of shame. That was why at first I whispered to you. That was why I told you that no one could hear us. It was for your sake, not mine." She stopped and sighed.

"Why do you sigh?" I asked.

"Because I cannot say what I want."

"Try," I said.

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"No, it is no use now. What have you been buying?"

I gave her a list of my purchases, and she went over them, as it seemed to me, a little sadly. "You have not bought the best things," she said. "But they will cost you all that you have here, one gardenia and a sprig of maidenhair."

"Is that flower really worth more than the two sovereigns that I offered you?"

"Yes, we have none here, and flowers are the only purity on your earth."

"But this will die in an hour."

"No," she said, "it would have died there, but here it will never die." As I laid it on the counter I noticed that even the maidenhair was quite fresh.

"If I had only known," I said, "I would have loaded my cab with flowers. Can I not come back again?"

"No—never."

"Then let me change the things that I have bought. They seemed high and noble, especially the White Love."

"Yes, you shall change them. You did not value the Love because it was noble, but because it made you feel noble."

"And what shall I buy for myself?"

"Nothing. If you had kept the goods that you ordered, you would have made a little flutter on an indescribably small portion of a rather insignificant world. You would have been called the great poet, the eminent statesman, and it would not have helped you any

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further—it would not have raised you any higher. Your nature would still have been bounded on the earth by earthly possibilities. No, you shall buy nothing for yourself. There is only one step that you can take that will bring you nearer me. There is only one thing that you can do that has a real value.”

“You mean self-denial,” I said. “I will obey you. I surrender all that I had bought. You shall give me instead the best thing for some one else—for whom?”

“For your own father.”

I bent my head in shame. It was a subject of which I could hardly bear to speak; but she with great tenderness, laying one of her little hands softly and caressingly on mine, dropped her voice almost to a whisper.

“Yes, for your father. My poor boy, there are no secrets between you and me. There is to be no shame between you and me. I know all. In the same asylum where your grandfather died your father now lies. His reason is gone. A horrible darkness has come over his mind. He lies there moaning and——”

“Stop!” I cried. “For pity’s sake say no more. You are right. Give me the best thing for him.”

“It shall be so,” she said. “And now the end of your time here grows near. But you have taken the first step. You and I have advanced a little further towards the sacred unity of the new love. Come, let us go and look down at the stars, and I will tell you about them.”

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She came round to my side of the counter, and we passed through the door together. Her bare feet trod lightly on the crystal blocks with which the street was paved. I gazed at her in an ecstasy of adoration. The cab was still standing there, and the horse looked round at us. He grinned horribly, showing his yellow fangs.

"Oh my ! ain't it sweet !" he called out.

"You vulgar beast !" I said to him angrily, "if you say another word, I'll take that whip and simply flay you."

"You needn't distress yourself," he answered, "because you'll be asleep in two minutes."

I saw that she had taken no notice of the unmannerly animal. She had crossed the street, and was leaning over the low stone wall, with her beautiful head supported on one hand ; I saw that my most dignified course was to follow her, and I did so.

"Yes," she said, pointing downwards with her finger, "those are the other worlds. They were put there to be a heating and lighting apparatus for the most insignificant of them—at least that is the prevalent creed, for the most insignificant. Do not believe it. On each one there is life, and for each one there is a purpose ; all are part of one scheme that——"

The horse was quite right. At this point, I rested my head on my arms as I leaned over the parapet, and went fast asleep. I can never forgive myself for it, but I was powerless to prevent it. I do not know how long I

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slept, but I woke suddenly. She was no longer leaning over the parapet; she stood on the pathway, gazing upwards, with a strange light in her eyes. Of course she was in the middle of a sentence. That was only part of the generally unsatisfactory nature of everything.

“—would get new experiences, new data. You would think and imagine new things. You would know what the new love means. I can only speak to you as a woman to a man, but I do not look at you as a woman would. She would see only a poor little schoolmaster, not very beautiful, rather sleepy-headed, in a dress-suit much too tight for him. I too can see that. But I see also a life that long ago came out into the darkness hand-in-hand with mine. Had you been placed in this world, you would have known as I know; but I came here, and you were sent elsewhere. Out of the same clay the potter makes two vessels, one to honour and one to dishonour.”

“And that is extremely unjust,” I said.

“It would be quite impossible for you to think otherwise; but you are wrong. You will soon know that you are wrong.”

“When?” I asked.

“On the day that you know my name, when the earthly love that you feel for me is changed to the new love of which it is the shadow, when we come back together, you and I, out of the darkness into the light.”

“Where is the light?”

“Look upwards. There are no more stars, and above all seems dark. And the darkness flows on like a river, on and on. But the river will run dry at the last, the darkness will have passed at the last, and then we shall enter into the light.”

“And now,” said the voice of the unconscionable cab-horse behind us, “I will ask you to join with me in singing the last hymn on the paper.”

“What on earth,” I exclaimed testily, “is the point of making that perfectly idiotic remark?”

“Mere absent-mindedness,” the brute answered. “I thought from the general style of the conversation that I was at some missionary meeting. That’s all.”

“At any rate,” I said, “you need not interrupt a—a lady.”

“Lady! S’help me! That high-toned, female grocer’s assistant, a lady!” The beast positively shrieked with laughter. “Get into the cab, you little fool, and let’s get home. There’s no place like home.”

I sprang at the cab, seized the whip, and determined to take my revenge. But I never got it. The agile beast waltzed round and round with amazing rapidity in the middle of the street. I struck out wildly; but though I occasionally hit the cab, I never succeeded in hitting the horse. All this time the cabman remained motionless. Suddenly the brute stopped, and backed the cab right into me. I fell down on the pavement by

THE CELESTIAL GROCERY

the low wall. I picked myself up and gazed around.

She was no longer there.

I staggered across the road. The lights were out in the grocery. I tried the door, but it was locked. I shook it, and called loudly, but no answer came. Once more I turned savagely on the horse, but at the first stroke the whip broke in my hands.

“Now then,” he yelled, “you little fool, get into the cab, and let’s enter into the Light !”

For a moment I stood there helpless. I felt weak and sick with my fall. Then I flung down the broken whip, and got into the cab, which started instantly at full speed. I buried my face in my hands, and burst into tears.

When, after a moment, I looked up again, there was the roar of the London streets about me, and we were within a hundred yards of my lodgings. The cab stopped at them, and I got out. It was evident that the cabman knew nothing about what had happened ; he looked cheery, comfortable, and commonplace. I saw that there would be no use in speaking to him about it. I merely paid him three times his proper fare, to compensate him for the loss of his whip, which, by the way, he did not seem to have noticed.

I was very tired, and soon went off to sleep. I had lost fame, and I had gained for my father a return to sanity. It was worth the sacrifice. He should come to London, and live with me. It was years since I had been

able to speak to him. Then slumber interrupted my thoughts.

As soon as I woke in the morning I sprang from my bed, and took up my dress-coat. No, it was no dream. The gardenia and maidenhair were gone, and my father had regained his reason. Would that I could see her once more, and thank her.

There came a tap at my door.

"All right, Mrs. Smith," I cried. "I'm getting up."

"There's a telegram for you, sir."

It was pushed under the door. I opened it. It was from the doctor at the asylum where my father was placed, and it read as follows :

"Your father died suddenly early this morning. Please come at once."

There have been no further developments, and I do not know what to do. I feel that I must see her, and ask her. I cannot understand. And, alas ! I cannot get to her.

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Since writing the above, I have had a letter from my Principal. He wants my resignation. He says something about "strangeness of manner—medical advice—real kindness to me—hope for recovery." Mrs. Smith has asked me, with tears in her eyes, to leave my apartments. She says that I have been most regular in my payments, and in every way showed myself to be a perfect gentleman ; but the other lodgers are frightened of me,

THE CELESTIAL GROCERY

and I frighten her sometimes. She can feel for me, because she had a cousin who once went off like that ; but would I mind going ?

Well, I have resigned my post, and to-night I leave my lodgings. I am very lonely.

EXCHANGE

I

DORIS

THERE was once a girl-child named Doris who went out skating with her bigger brothers one afternoon over flooded fields in the Fen country. But her brothers played hockey with school-fellows, and Doris skated contentedly enough by herself. She was wearing Bob's skates, which she liked better than her own, and the man had put them on very well indeed. She went from one field through a gap in the hedge into the next, and then on into a third field. There were very few people here, and most of the ice was not swept; all of this was very pleasant to Doris, and made her feel adventurous. It was beautiful, too; and even children unconsciously understand a sunset with those old thin trees trembling black against the crimson disc, and everywhere bits of white brightness on a grey sea of fog. She skated as fast as she could, the wind helping her, feeling strangely and splendidly animated, when quite suddenly . . .

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But this was not the Fen country. This was the north of Yorkshire. She had been here

before on a visit to her cousins. Yonder was the top of Winder; she had climbed it on clear days and seen Morecambe Bay flashing in the distance. But it was night now, almost a black night, and it was very cold for Doris to be wandering over those hills alone. She had an irritating sensation that she had to go somewhere before the dawn came, and that she did not know where or why. It was lonely and awesome. "If I only had somebody to speak to, I shouldn't mind it so much," she said to herself. At once she heard a low voice saying "Doris! Doris!" and she looked round.

In a recess of the ravine which a ghyll had made for itself as it leapt from the cold purity of a hill-top to the warm humanity of a village in the valley—a village no better than it should have been—a small fire of sticks was smouldering. Doris could just see that the person crouched in front of the fire—the person who had called her by her name—was an old, haggard woman, with her chin resting on her knees.

"Tell me, old woman," Doris said, almost angrily, "what does this all mean? I was at Lingay Fen skating, and now I am wandering over the Yorkshire hills. It has changed from afternoon to night——"

"It generally does," said the old woman in a chilly, unemphatic way. Doris stamped her foot impatiently: "I mean that it has changed quite suddenly. Just a moment ago, too, I felt quite certain that I had to go somewhere, and I had forgotten where. Now I don't think I have to go anywhere."

EXCHANGE

"No—you have arrived," said the old woman softly.

At that moment a dry twig burst into flame, and lit up the old woman's face and figure for a second. She was hideous enough; her face was thin and yellow; her cavernous eyes sparkled to the momentary flicker. Her dress and cloak were torn and faded, but they had been bright scarlet.

"You naturally ask why," she continued, "because you are young and have not yet learned the uselessness of it. What has just happened to you seems very meaningless and foolish, but it is not more meaningless and foolish than the rest of things. It is all a poor sort of game you know. Explain? No, I shall not explain; but it was I who brought you here. Sit down by me under the night sky, and watch."

"No, I will not," said Doris, and walked away. She took about ten paces away, and then came back again and did the very thing which she said she would not do. She sat down by the old woman, and was a little angry because she could not help doing it. Then she began to grumble at the fire. "That's not half a fire," she said; "it just smoulders and makes smoke. I will show you what you ought to do. You put on some fresh sticks—so. Then you put your mouth quite close to the embers, and blow and keep—on—blowing. There!" She had fitted her actions to her words, and now a bright flame leaped out. It shone all over, on her dark hair and dark bright eyes, and on

the grey furs of her dress. It shone, too, on the old woman, who was smiling an ugly, half-suppressed smile.

"Doris," said the old woman, "leave the fire alone. I do not want flame. I only want it to stream forth smoke."

"But why?"

"See now—there." The old woman made a downward gesture with both hands, and the flame sank obediently down again, giving place to a quick yield of black smoke. "Look at the smoke, Doris. That is what you have to watch." There was a little more energy in the old, quavering voice now.

Doris did as she was told; but suddenly she stopped and cried, half-frightened: "There are faces in it!"

"Yes, yes," said the old woman almost eagerly; "and there are pictures of the future in it—of the future as it will be unless I alter it this night. I alone can alter it, you know. Are you not glad now that you came?"

"It is something like fortune-telling: did you ever have your fortune told?"

"No, I never did," replied the old woman. Her smile was very ugly indeed.

"But how shall I know that it's true?"

"Why, you *do* know."

That was the strangest part of it. Doris felt certain without having a reason that she could give for it. "Show me my future," she said breathlessly.

"Watch the smoke, then."

So she watched, and picture followed picture.

EXCHANGE

At the first of them she made some little exclamation. "Ah!" she cried, "that is a splendid dress; and I *do* like those shoes. I wish I might have long dresses now—I'm sure I'm old enough; and I want to have my hair done up the proper way, but——." She stopped suddenly, because the picture had changed. "I look much prettier in this one," she said. "I have been dancing, I think, from the dress, and because I seem a little out of breath. There is a man with me and now he—no, no! I would *not*. I should hate it. That picture cannot be right!" The third picture represented her marriage with great splendour. "Well," she said, "I do not mind that so much—just standing up and wearing a beautiful veil. But I don't want to be married at all. I like skating ever so much better."

There was a faint sound of laughter, muffled and bitter, from the old woman. "You like skating?" she said. "Where are your skates, then, Doris?" Doris looked for them, but could not find them, and this distressed her. "Oh, what *shall* I do? They were not my skates: they were Bob's."

"Who is Bob?"

"Bob is my smallest brother—ever so much younger than I am; he's my favourite brother, too. He's got red hair, but he's a pretty boy."

"He must be a milksop if he can't skate."

"He *can* skate. He can do the outside edge backwards; he skates better than any of my three big brothers."

"Well, well—it's a pity that he's stupid though."

"Stupid. Do you know why he lent me his skates? Because he was going to write a story this afternoon, and he's going to put me in it. Bob can do almost anything. He's wonderful. When he grows up he'll very likely write a whole book, he says."

"Look at his future—Bob's future—in the smoke," said the old woman grimly, heaping on more sticks.

Doris looked reluctantly. The pictures came flashing past one after the other. Some she could not altogether understand, for she knew nothing of the vices of young men; but they were vaguely terrible. But even a child could understand the last picture of all. It was awful and vivid. She almost fancied that she could hear the report of the pistol, and the dim thud as the body fell awkwardly on the floor.

"You needn't cry," said the old woman, as Doris burst into tears.

"Oh—Bob is so splendid!" sobbed Doris. "Don't let it be like that. Do alter it. You don't know him, or you would change it. You said you could. I'll give you everything I've got if you'll stop it somehow."

"Will you give me your beauty—your youth—your life?"

"Oh, willingly—everything!"

"I want none of them—none of them," said the old woman fiercely and quickly. "But I want something else. Give it me, and I will alter it, as you wish." She stretched out a lean

finger and tapped Doris's forehead, and whispered a few words in her ear.

Doris turned white enough, but she nodded assent. "Then it will alter my future too," she said with a little gasp.

"It will alter the future of everybody in the world—indirectly and in some cases very slightly. But you will give it me?"

"Yes, yes." She paused a moment, and then added a torrent of questions: "Old woman, who are you? Why are you dressed in scarlet, why did you have me brought here? I should like it to turn out to be a dream. Oh! why do you want it? Why are you so horribly—horribly cruel?"

But the old woman, and the fire, and the great dark hills grew dim and indistinct; and there was no answer.

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The two old men—one with a medical, the other with a military air—came slowly down the broad staircase from the bedrooms without speaking. The little red-headed boy was waiting for them as usual. "Is Doris any better, papa?" he asked eagerly. "Will she live?"

It was no good to keep it from him; he would have to know sooner or later.

"Yes, Bob," said the Colonel, "she will live. But the—the injury to her head has——" He stopped with a gulping sound in his voice. The boy looked up at him wistfully with a scared face.

"Don't, Colonel," said the doctor; "you'd better leave it to me. I will tell the boy."

II

MAJOR GUNNICAL

NOBODY ever denied in my presence that Major Gunnical was a capital shot and a good fellow. He went straight, and it was always imputed to him for righteousness. But the other day the only man of the world with whom I am acquainted accused the Major of want of taste, and based his accusation on the fact that he took the liberty of dying in the country-house of a friend, not having been invited for that purpose. I might have pointed out that Major Gunnical knew Sir Charles quite well enough to take a liberty which would have been unpardonable in a casual guest; I might have added that it was one of those accidents which may happen to any man, and that it was unintentional and unforeseen on the Major's part. But I prefer to give the facts of the case, which seem to me to explain everything.

On the evening which opened the night of his death, Major Gunnical had gone upstairs to dress sooner than the rest of them. He stood in his bedroom with his back to the fire, well knowing that if the back be warm the whole body is warm also. He was half afraid that he had caught a chill, and chills affected him. There was nothing in his appearance to tell you that his heart was wrong. His body

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was large and muscular, and he looked a strong man. His hair had only just begun to get a little grey. His complexion was pale, but it had been tanned by hot suns and seemed clear and healthy. His eyes were thoughtful grey eyes—quite out of keeping with the active look of the man. His best point was his simple directness: he could do right things, even when they were not easy, without thinking of them at the time or afterwards. His worst point was his temper, which broke loose occasionally. At the present moment he was thinking about himself, which was not a usual occurrence with Major Gunnical, and his thoughts were depressing; so he tried to dismiss them. “It’s all nervousness and too much tobacco,” he thought to himself; “but I will go up to town to-morrow and let old Peterson prescribe for me. I shall be all right in a day—probably only liver—no exercise, thanks to this cursed frost. Oh yes, it’s just liver—nothing else.”

He paused once when he was fastening his collar, and said slowly and distinctly, “Damn presentiments.” But he was not able to shake off a feeling of quietness: a desire to be at peace with men, and a tendency to look at the sad side of things. When he got downstairs he found only one man already in the drawing-room: a man called Kenneth, who wrote. Now there was a certain disagreement between Kenneth and the Major. In the smoking-room the night before, the Major had expressed his sincere admiration for a certain story of soldier-life by

a new writer, and Kenneth had explained to him that this admiration was wrong, because the story was not at all well constructed.

"I own," he had said, "that it takes a critic to see the faults of the technique." This was a little vain of Kenneth. "Yes," said the Major hotly, "and it takes a *man* to feel the merits of the story." This was a little rude of the Major, for Kenneth was obviously an effeminate person. Kenneth put up his eyeglasses and looked at the Major curiously. "Don't be so damnably affected," said the Major. Then Sir Charles had interposed lazily.

Consequently, when the Major entered the drawing-room Kenneth at once began to assume more dignity than Providence had made him able to carry easily. The Major walked up to him and held out one hand. "Look here, Kenneth," he said, "I'm an old fool, and always thinking I know another man's business as well as my own. I'd no right to question your opinion last night and make an angry ass of myself. I'm sorry." Kenneth's dignity came down heavily, and he took the Major's hand at once. For a fortnight he loved him, and then he told publicly the story of how he had gone to the Major and forced him to apologize. For there is a combination of imagination and vanity which nothing—not even kindness—can kill.

The Major was very dull at dinner, but when his host's two children came in afterwards they seemed to find him very satisfactory. The Major loved children. He did not stop very

long in the smoking-room that night. He wanted badly to be alone.

For some time after he had gone to bed he lay awake thinking. Maude, his host's elder daughter, reminded him in appearance of his own niece Doris. It seemed hard that Maude should be so bright and happy, and that Doris—owing to a skating accident—should be condemned to lose all her brightness, and her flow of talk, and her power to understand. Yet Doris never seemed actually unhappy; her eyes were vacant, as if the light behind them had gone out, but she did not seem to be suffering. During the first part of her illness she had babbled about some woman, an old woman dressed in scarlet, who frightened her.

Thus thinking, the Major fell asleep. It was long past midnight when he opened his eyes and saw a figure of a woman standing on the hearthrug, and stretching yellow hands like claws towards the remnant of the fire. It startled him, but he did not want to wake up the rest of the house.

“What are you doing in my room?” he said in a rapid whisper.

The old woman turned round. He could hardly see her face, but the flicker of the fire showed him that she was dressed in rags of faded scarlet. Her voice was very gentle and low.

“Awake? Are you awake? I made a little noise to wake you on purpose. But generally they go on sleeping when I come. I am the scarlet woman of whom Doris spoke. She has been taken.”

“Dead ? A merciful deliverance.”

“No, she is not delivered yet. She has to go through life again in a lower form before she is delivered. I hate her. I will see that she is unhappy again before she is delivered.”

“Why does this all seem real, instead of seeming fantastic and absurd—as it ought to ? ”

“Because it *is* real : but they always ask me that, all those who see me. Doris shall become a caged bird, I think—one of those who are driven nearly mad by captivity, and yet are so strong that they die slowly.”

“You can’t do that,” said the Major quickly.

“You know I can, and you know I shall,” replied the old woman in the same soft whisper. “I need not argue, or prove, or do anything of that kind. When I speak men *know* that all is as I say ; but they do not often hear me, because they are nearly always asleep when I come.”

“Where is Doris now ? ”

“She waits in dreamland, where nothing is real, until I get my opportunity, and she is born once more, and caught, and caged, and tortured.”

As she said this she seemed to grow a little more excited ; and, as if in sympathy with her, the fire suddenly burned up more brightly, and showed her horrible, lean face and deep, leering eyes.

“That’s cruel,” said the Major. “And what shall I be when I die ? ”

“You will not have a bad time,” she said, grinning. “You shall be a dear little white

lamb that lives an hour and then is delivered. You will die to-night, by-the-way. But Doris shall beat her heart out against bars, because I hate her. You will see one another in dream-land, while you are waiting until I get the two right opportunities."

An idea occurred to the Major. "Change us, Doris and myself."

The old woman trembled with agitation, and her voice rose shrilly. "I will not! I will not!" she cried.

But something bright and sure, like a steady light, seemed to fill the man's mind. "But you will—you cannot help it," he answered very quietly.

The old woman strode quickly across the room, her face aflame with rage, and touched him on the heart. He fell backward, and did not speak any more.

"I must always come when they are asleep in future," said the old woman, as she went back to the fire. "It is too much to risk—I have lost by Doris and this man." There was a long pause. "But I will torture him even more than I would have tortured Doris," she whispered gently to the fire.

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Two months afterwards a white lamb was born, in a sheltered place, on a grassy fell. And in an hour it died.

And on the same day a certain bird-catcher, resident in Whitechapel, went out early and had luck.

III

DORIS IN THE HEREAFTER

THE release had come at last. To Doris it was an exquisite release; the years spent in darkness were over; the short, mystical period which followed her death was over; her spirit went out into the moonlit night—white, naked, beautiful. She could remember but little consciously of her earth-life. She had suffered—she could recollect that, and she had spoken with a grim woman: an old woman dressed in rags of faded scarlet. She did not recollect what had been said, but she knew that it had been the beginning of the darkness which had fallen on her mind. Of her death she knew nothing; of a short strange time after her death she knew little, dimly and vaguely.

She was free, and it was enough for her. It seemed to her that she still kept the body which had been called Doris during its earth-life, but that now it was light as the air, stronger than before, and far more beautiful. She stood, a childish figure, graceful and erect, on a shred of dark cloud which a steady night-wind blew past the hill-tops and over the valley. Below her she could see the flooded river, angry with its old stone bridges, crying itself to sleep in long, still reaches, with the mists rising white all about it. She saw, too,

much that the living do not see. In a lonely cottage, low and roughly built, some young Spring flowers had just died : she saw their souls—their fragrance, as she had been used to call it—pass upwards ; and as they passed they changed, and became a handful of ghost-lilies in the garden-land of dreams. And all night long she went on her way, seeing beautiful things. She could never be tired any more ; and the rain and the dew did not hurt her ; and the cold wind did not seem cold to her.

And when the morning came, a little baby breeze came up to her with a message. It was so young and forgetful that it had not got the exact words of the message. But it remembered the drift of it. “ He said you were to go and look for sorrows,” it whispered in her ear. It lingered for a moment, playing with her hair, and then it went down below and tried to blow a dandelion clock. And not being strong enough, it sat down and sulked ; for it had not yet learnt that the only things worth doing are the things one cannot do.

Then Doris went on about her work, very happy, singing little songs that she remembered. And first of all she went to a great house where a proud and beautiful lady lived. But the proud lady sat huddled up and quite undignified in her own room, crying till her nose was red and she was not pleasant to see. And all because some one or other—I think it was her husband—was dead, and was going to be for ever happy ! Doris laughed contemptuously, and passed on.

She next went to a nursery where there was a little freckled girl with sandy hair. And the little girl was unhappy because of a bad accident to a ninepenny doll, which was her most intimate friend. There was a small hole in the doll's neck and a possible escape of sawdust. It was only by holding the doll wrong way up and shaking it that you could make the sawdust come out ; and the little girl did not want the sawdust to come out at all, for it caused her agony when it came out ; and yet she held the doll upside down and shook it. For this was the kind of girl that, when she grows up, becomes a woman. Doris was sorry for her, and whispered in her ear : " You had better get a little piece of stamp-paper and stick it over the hole in the doll's neck—but it won't last long." The child thought Doris was a beautiful idea, and went radiantly to the study and opened the dispatch-box. There was no stamp paper. There was one penny stamp, and she knew that it was wicked to take it. So she compromised—which was feminine of her—and tore the stamp in two and only took half of it. Then she went back to the nursery, and fixed the half-stamp as Doris had suggested. Doris, who had watched her, was horrified. " You ought not to have taken that stamp," she said to her. " You had better confess what you have done, and say that you do not wish to tell a lie." Then the little girl supposed Doris was conscience—for, of course, Doris was invisible—and did not think quite so much of her. Neither did she confess. Doris was not very

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unhappy about it, knowing that children are always forgiven and occasionally forgotten.

She saw many other sorrows, and she thought very little of them. People, she perceived, always exaggerated the importance of death, of money, and love. Yet she saw a wind—a venomous wind—snap the stalk of the very loveliest daffodil, and nobody wore black clothes for it, or had sherry-and-biscuits, or showed any of the signs of sorrow. She had only been for a few hours in the Hereafter, and yet she already felt herself to be out of touch with humanity.

And it happened that she came to a great dirty city, and she stopped where a cage of wicker-work was hung outside a grimy shop in a grimy street. There were several things in the cage : a yellow glass for water, with no water in it ; a blue glass for seed, with no seed in it ; something which had once been a turf and now looked like a badly cooked brick ; and something which panted on the floor of the cage in the corner—it was all that was left of a bird, a soaring bird that loved the upper air and the sunlight, but was now reduced to plain dying and high thinking. Now none of the other sorrowful persons had seen Doris ; but the bird saw her and called to her, but she did not understand the language. She went into the shop and whispered to the man in charge : “ Your bird outside wants attention ; it’s ill.”

“ Bless my soul ! and I gave a shilling for it ! ”
So he took the bird some water and something

to eat which was not good for it. The bird chirped. "It knows me, and loves me already," said the man. It was really saying, "Would you kindly wring my neck, and end this?"

"I am sorry for it," said Doris, as she passed on. "I am glad I was never a pet." She would have been more sorry if she had known all the history of that bird.

THE GLASS OF SUPREME MOMENTS

LUCAS MORNE sat in his college rooms, when the winter afternoon met the evening, depressed and dull. There were various reasons for his depression. He was beginning to be a little nervous about his health. A week before he had run second in a mile race, the finish of which had been a terrible struggle ; ever since then any violent exertion or excitement had brought on symptoms which were painful, and to one who had always been strong, astonishing. He had felt them early that afternoon, on coming from the river. Besides, he was discontented with himself. He had had several men in his rooms that afternoon, who were better than he was, men who had enthusiasms and had found them satisfying. Lucas had a moderate devotion to athletics, but no great enthusiasm. Neither had he the finer perceptions. Neither was he a scholar. He was just an ordinary man, and reputed to be a good fellow.

His visitors had drunk his tea, talked of their own enthusiasms, and were now gone. Nothing is so unclean as a used tea-cup ; nothing is so cold as toast which has once been hot, and the

COLLECTED TALES

concrete expression of dejection is crumbs. Even Lucas Morne, who had not the finer perceptions, was dimly conscious that his room had become horrible, and now flung open the window. One of the men—a large, clumsy man—had been smoking mitigated Latakia; and Latakia has a way of rolling itself all round the atmosphere and kicking. Lucas seated himself in his easiest chair.

His rooms were near the chapel, and he could hear the organ. The music and the soft fall of the darkness were soothing; he could hardly see the used tea-cups now; the light from the gas-lamp outside came just a little way into the room, shyly and obliquely

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Well, he had not noticed it before, but the fireplace had become a staircase. He felt too lazy to wonder much at this. He would, he thought, have the things all altered back again on the morrow. It would be worth while to sell the staircase, seeing that its steps were fashioned of silver and crystal. Unfortunately he could not see how much there was of it, or whither it led. The first five steps were clear enough; he felt convinced that the workmanship of them was Japanese. But the rest of the staircase was hidden from his sight by a grey veil of mist. He found himself a little angry, in a severe and strictly logical way, that in these days of boasted science we could not prevent a piece of fog, measuring ten feet by seven, from coming in at an open window and sitting

S U P R E M E M O M E N T S

down on a staircase which had only just begun to exist, and blotting out all but five steps of it in its very earliest moments. He allowed that it was a beautiful mist; its colour changed slowly from grey to rose, and then back again from rose to grey; fire-flies of silver and gold shot through it at intervals; but it was a nuisance, because he wanted to see the rest of the staircase, and it prevented him. Every moment the desire to see more grew stronger. At last he determined to shake off his laziness, and go up the staircase and through the mist into the something beyond. He felt sure that the something beyond would be beautiful—sure with the certainty which has nothing to do with logical conviction.

It seemed to him that it was with an effort that he brought himself to rise from the chair and walk to the foot of that lovely staircase. He hesitated there for a moment or two, and as he did so he heard the sound of footsteps, high up, far away, yet coming nearer and nearer, with light music in the sound of them. Some one was coming down the staircase. He listened eagerly and excitedly. Then through the grey mist came a figure robed in grey.

It was the figure of a woman—young, with wonderful grace in her movements. Her face was veiled, and all that could be seen of her as she paused on the fifth step was the soft dark hair that reached to her waist, and her arms—white wonders of beauty. The rest was hidden by the grey veil and the long grey robe, that left, however, their suggestion of classical grace

and slenderness. Lucas Morne stood looking at her tremulously. He felt sure, too, that she was looking at him, and that she could see through the folds of the thin grey veil that hid her face. She was the first to speak. Her voice in its gentleness and delicacy was like the voice of a child; it was only afterwards that he heard in it the under-thrill which told of more than childhood.

“Why have you not come? I have been waiting for you, you know, up there. And this is the only time,” she added.

“I am very sorry,” he stammered. “You see—I never knew the staircase was there until to-day. In fact—it seems very stupid of me—but I always thought it was a fire-place. I must have been dreaming, of course. And then this afternoon I thought, or dreamed, that a lot of men came in to see me. Perhaps they really did come; and we got talking, you know——”

“Yes,” she said, with the gentlest possible interruption. “I *do* know. There was one man, Fynsale, large, ugly, clumsy, a year your senior. He sat in that chair over there, and sulked, and smoked Latakia. I rather like the smell of Latakia. He especially loves to write or to say some good thing; and at times he can do it. Therefore you envy him. Then there was Blake. Blake is an athlete, like yourself, but is just a little more successful. Yes, I know you are good, but Blake is very good. You were tried for the 'Varsity—Blake was selected. He and Fynsale both have delight in ability,

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and you envy both. There was that dissenting little Paul Reece. He is not exactly in your set, but you were at school with him, and so you tolerate him. How good he is, for all his insignificance and social defects ! Blake knows that, and kept a guard on his talk this afternoon. He would not offend Paul Reece for worlds. Paul's belief gives him earnestness, his earnestness leads him to self-sacrifice, and self-sacrifice is deep delight to him. You have more ability than Paul Reece, but you cannot reach that kind of enthusiastic happiness, and therefore you envy him. I could say similar things of the other men. It was because they made you vaguely dissatisfied with yourself that they bored you. You take pleasure—a certain pleasure—in athletics, and that pleasure would become an enthusiastic delight if you were a little better at them. Some men could get the enthusiastic delight out of as much as you can do, but your temperament is different. I know you well. You are not easily satisfied. You are not clever, but you are——” She paused, but without any sign of embarrassment.

“What am I ?” he asked eagerly. He felt sure that it would be something good, and he was not less vain than other men.

“I do not think I will say—not now.”

“But who are you ?” His diffidence and stammering had vanished beneath her calm, quiet talk. “You must let me at least ask that. Who are you ? And how do you know all this ?”

“I am a woman, but not an earth-woman.

And the chief difference between us is that I know nearly all the things you do not know, and you do not know nearly all the things that I know. Sometimes I forget your ignorance—do not be angry for a word ; there is no other for it, and it is not your fault. I forgot it just now when I asked you why you had not come to me up the staircase of silver and crystal, through the grey veil where the fire-flies live, and into that quiet room beyond. This is the only time ; to-morrow it will not be possible. And I have——” Once more she paused. There was a charm for Lucas Morne in the things which she did not say. “Your room is dark,” she continued, “and I can hardly see you.”

“I will light the lamp,” said Lucas hurriedly, “and—and won’t you let me get you some tea ?” He saw, as soon as he had said it, how unspeakably ludicrous this proffer of hospitality was. He almost fancied a smile, a moment’s shimmer of little white teeth, beneath the long grey veil. “Or shall I come now—at once,” he added.

“Come now ; I will show you the mirror.”

“What is that ?”

“You will understand when you see it. It is the glass of supreme moments. I shall tell you about it. But come.”

She looked graceful, and she suggested the most perfect beauty as she stood there, a slight figure against the background of grey mist, which had grown luminous as the room below grew darker. Lucas Morne went carefully up

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the five steps, and together they passed through the grey, misty curtain. He was wondering what the face was like which was hidden beneath that veil ; would it be possible to induce her to remove the veil ? He might, perhaps, lead the conversation thither—delicately and subtly.

“ A cousin of mine,” he began, “ who has travelled a good deal, once told me that the women of the East——”

“ Yes,” she said, and her voice and way were so gentle that it hardly seemed like an interruption ; “ and so do I.”

He felt very much anticipated ; for a moment he was driven back into the shy and stammering state. There were only a few more steps now, and then they entered through a rosy curtain into a room, which he supposed to be “ that quiet room beyond,” of which she had spoken.

It was a large room, square in shape. The floor was covered with black and white tiles, with the exception of a small square space in the centre, which looked like silver, and over which a ripple seemed occasionally to pass. She pointed it out to him. “ That,” she said, “ is the glass of supreme moments.” There were no windows, and the soft light that filled the room seemed to come from that liquid silver mirror in the centre of the floor. The walls, which were lofty, were hung with curtains of different colours, all subdued, dreamy, reposeful. These colours were repeated in the painting of the ceiling. In a recess at the further end of the room there were

seats, low seats on which one could sleep. There was a faint smell of syringa in the air, making it heavy and drowsy. Now and then one heard faintly, as if afar off, the great music of an organ. Could it, he found himself wondering, be the organ of the college chapel? It was restful and pleasant to hear. She drew him to one of the seats in the recess, and once more pointed to the mirror.

“All the ecstasy in the world lies reflected there. The supreme moments of each man’s life—the scene, the spoken words—all lie there. Past and present, and future—all are there.”

“Shall I be able to see them?”

“If you will.”

“And how?”

“Bend over the mirror, and say the name of the man or woman into whose life you wish to see. You only have to want it, and it will appear before your eyes. But there are some lives which have no supreme moments.”

“Commonplace lives?”

“Yes.”

Lucas Morne walked to the edge of the mirror and knelt down, looking into it. The ripple passed to and fro over the surface. For a moment he hesitated, doubting for whom he should ask; and then he said in a low voice: “Are there supreme moments in the life of Blake—Vincent Blake, the athlete?” The surface of the mirror suddenly grew still, and in it rose what seemed a living picture.

He could see once more the mile race in which he had been defeated by Blake. It was the

third and last lap ; and he himself was leading by some twenty yards, for Blake was waiting. There was a vast crowd of spectators, and he could hear every now and then the dull sound of their voices. He saw Vincent Blake slightly quicken his pace, and marked his own plucky attempt to answer it ; he saw, too, that he had very little left in him. Gradually Blake drew up, until at a hundred yards from the finish there were not more than five yards between the two runners. Then he noticed his own fresh attempt. There were some fifty yards of desperate fighting, in which neither seemed to gain or lose an inch on the other. The voices of the excited crowd rose to a roar. And then—then Blake had it his own way. He saw himself passed a yard from the tape.

“ Blake has always just beaten me,” he said savagely as he turned from the mirror.

He went back to his seat. “ Tell me,” he said : “ Does that picture really represent the supreme moments of Blake’s life ? ”

“ Yes,” answered the veiled woman, “ he will have nothing quite like the ecstasy which he felt at winning that race. He will marry, and have children, and his married life will be happy, but the happiness will not be so intense. There is an emotion-meter outside this room, you know, which measures such things.”

“ Now if one wanted to bet on a race,” he began. Then he stopped short. He had none of the finer perceptions, but it did not take these to show him that he was becoming a little inappropriate. “ I will look again at the

mirror," he added after a pause. "I am afraid, though, that all this will make me more discontented with myself."

Once more he looked into the glass of supreme moments. He murmured the name of Paul Reece, the good little dissenter, his old schoolfellow. It was not in the power of accomplishment that Paul Reece excelled Lucas Morne, but only in the goodness and spirituality of his nature. As he looked, once more a picture formed on the surface of the mirror. It was of the future this time.

It was a sombre picture of the interior of a church. Through the open door one saw the snow falling slowly into the dusk of a winter afternoon. Within, before the richly decorated altar, flickered the little ruby flames of hanging lamps. On the walls, dim in the dying light, were painted the stations of the Cross. The fragrance of the incense smoke still lingered in the air. He could see but one figure, bowed, black-robed, before the altar. "And is this Paul Reece—who was a dissenter?" he asked himself, knowing that it was he. Some one was seated at the organ, and the cry of the music was full of appeal, and yet full of peace; "*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi!*"

Then the picture died away, and once more the little ripple moved to and fro over the surface of the liquid silver mirror. Lucas went back again to his place. The veiled woman was leaning backward, her small white hands linked together. She did not speak, but he was sure that she was looking at him—looking at him

intently. Slowly it came to him that there was in this woman a subtle, mastering attraction which he had never known before. And side by side with this thought there still remained the feeling which had filled him as he witnessed the supreme moments of Paul Reece, a paradoxical feeling which was half restlessness and half peace.

"I do not know if I envy Paul," he said, "but if so, it is not the envy which hurts. I shall never be like him. I can't feel as he does. It's not in me. But this picture did not make me angry as the other did." He looked steadfastly at the graceful, veiled figure, and added in a lower tone: "When I spoke of the travels of my cousin a little while ago—over Palestine, and Turkey, and thereabouts, you know—I had meant to lead up to a question, as you saw. I had meant to ask you if you would put away your veil and let me see your face. And there are many things which I want to know about you. May I not stay here by your side and talk?"

"Soon, very soon, I will talk with you, and after that you shall see me. What do you think, then, of the glass of supreme moments?"

"It is wonderful. I only feared the sight of exquisite happiness in others would make me more discontented. At first you seemed to think that I was too dissatisfied."

"Do not be deceived. Do not think that these supreme moments are everything; for that life is easiest which is gentle, level, placid, and has no supreme moments. There is a picture in the life of your friend Fynsale which

I wish you to see. Look at it in the mirror, and then I shall have something to tell you."

Lucas did as he was bidden. The mirror showed him a wretched, dingy room—sitting-room and bedroom combined—in a lodging-house. At a little rickety table, pushed in front of a very small fire, Fynsale sat writing by lamp-light. The lamp was out of order apparently. The combined smell of lamp and Latakia was poignant. There was a pile of manuscript before him, and on the top of it he was placing the sheet he had just written. Then he rose from his chair, folded his arms on the mantel-piece, and bent down, with his head on his hands, looking into the fire. It was an uncouth attitude of which, Lucas remembered, Fynsale had been particularly fond when he was at college.

When the picture had passed, Lucas looked round, and saw that the veiled woman had left the recess, and was now standing by his side. "I do not understand this," he said. "How can those be the supreme moments in Fynsale's life? He looked poor and shabby, and the room was positively wretched. Where does the ecstasy come in?"

"He has just finished his novel; and he is quite madly in love with it. Some of it is very good, and some of it—from merely physical reasons—is very bad; he was half-starved when he was writing it, and it is not possible to write very well when one is half-starved. But he loves it. I am speaking of all this as if, like the picture of it, it was present; although, of

course, it has not happened yet. But I will tell you more. I will show you, in this case at least, what these moments of ecstasy are worth. Some of Fynsale's book, I have said, is very good, and some of it is very bad ; but none of it is what people want. He will take it to publisher after publisher, and they will refuse it. After three years it will at last be published, and it will not succeed in the least. And all through these years of failure he will recall from time to time the splendid joy he felt at finishing that book, and how glad he was that he had made it. The thought of that past ecstasy will make the torture all the worse."

"Perhaps, then, after all, I should be glad that I am commonplace ? " said Lucas.

"It does not always follow, though, that the commonplace people have commonplace lives. There have been men who have been so ordinary that it hurt one to have anything to do with them, and yet the gods have made them come into poetry."

Once more Lucas fancied that a smile with magic in it might be fluttering under that grey veil. Every moment the fascination of this woman, whose face he had not seen, and with whom he had spoken for so short a time, grew stronger on him. He did not know from whence it came, whether it lay in the grace of her figure and her movements, or in the beauty of her long, dark hair, or in the music of her voice, or in that subtle, indefinable way in which she seemed to show him that she cared for him deeply. The room itself, quiet,

mystical, restful, dedicated to the ecstasy of the world, had its effect upon his senses. More than ever before he felt himself impressed, tremulous with emotion. He knew that she saw how, in spite of himself, the look of adoration would come into his eyes.

And suddenly, she, whom but a moment before he had imagined to be smiling at her own light thoughts, seemed swayed by a more serious impulse.

"You must be comforted, though, and be angry with yourself no longer. For you are *not* commonplace, because you know that you *are* commonplace. It is something to have wanted the right things, although the gods have given you no power to attain them, nor even the wit and words to make your want eloquent." Her voice was deeper, touched with the under-thrill.

"This," he said, "is the second time you have spoken of the gods—and yet we are in the nineteenth century."

"Are we? I am very old and very young. Time is nothing to me; it does not change me. Yesterday in Italy each grave and stream spoke of divinity: '*Non omnis moriar*,' sang one in confidence, '*Non omnis moriar!*' I heard his voice, and now he is passed and gone from the world."

"We read him still," said Lucas Morne, with a little pride. He was not intending to take the classical tripes, but he had with the help of a translation read that ode from which she was quoting. She did not heed his interruption in the least. She went on speaking:

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“ And to-day in England there is but little which is sacred ; yet here, too, my work is seen ; and here, too, as they die, they cry : “ I shall not die, but live ! ”

“ You will think me stupid,” said Lucas Morne, a little bewildered, “ but I really do not understand you. I do not follow you. I cannot see to what you refer.”

“ That is because you do not know who I am. Before the end of to-day I think we shall understand each other well.”

There was a moment's pause, and then Lucas Morne spoke again.

“ You have told me that even in the lives of commonplace people there are sometimes supreme moments. I had scarcely hoped for them, and you have bidden me not to desire them. Shall I—even I—know what ecstasy means ? ”

“ Yes, yes ; I think so.”

“ Then let me see it, as I saw the rest pictured in the mirror.” He spoke with some hesitation, his eyes fixed on the tiled floor of the room.

“ That need not be,” she answered, and she hardly seemed to have perfect control over the tones of her voice now. “ That need not be, Lucas Morne, for the supreme moments of your life are here, here and now.”

He looked up, suddenly and excitedly. She had flung back the grey veil over her long, dark hair, and stood revealed before him, looking ardently into his eyes. Her face was paler than that of average beauty ; the lips, shapely and scarlet, were just parted ; but the eyes gave

the most wonderful charm. They were like flames at midnight—not the soft, grey eyes that make men better, but the passionate eyes that make men forget honour, and reason, and everything. She stretched out both hands towards him, impulsively, appealingly. He grasped them in his own. His own hands were hot, burning; every nerve in them tingled with excitement. For a moment he held her at arm's-length, looking at her, and said nothing. At last he found words:

“I knew that you would be like this. I think that I have loved you all my life. I wish that I might be with you for ever.”

There was a strange expression on her face. She did not speak, but she drew him nearer to her.

“Tell me your name,” he said.

“Yesterday, where that poet lived—that confident poet—they called me Libitina; and here, to-day, they call me Death. My name matters not, if you love me. For to you alone have I come thus. For the rest, I have done my work unseen. Only in this hour—only in this hour—was it possible.”

He had hardly heeded what she said. He bent down over her face.

“Stay!” she said in a hurried whisper, “if you kiss me you will die.”

He smiled triumphantly. “But I shall die kissing you,” he said. And so their lips met. Her lips were scarlet, but they were icy cold.

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S U P R E M E M O M E N T S

The captain of the football team had just come out of evening chapel, his gown slung over his arm, his cap pulled over his eyes, looking good-tempered, and strong, and jolly, but hardly devotional. He saw the window of Morne's rooms open—they were on the ground floor—and looked in. By the glow of the failing fire he saw what he thought was Lucas Morne seated in a lounge chair. He called to him, but there was no answer. "The old idiot's asleep," he said to himself, as he climbed in at the window. "Wake up, old man," he cried, as he put his hand on the shoulder of Lucas Morne's body, and swung it forward; "wake up, old man."

The body rolled forward and fell sideways to the ground heavily and clumsily. It lay there motionless.

ZERO

CHAPTER I

JAMES SMITH was a trainer and exhibitor of performing dogs. His age was forty-five, but on the stage he looked less, moving always with an alertness suggestive of youth. His face was dominant, but not cruel. He never petted a dog. On the other hand, he never thrashed a dog, unless he considered that the dog had deserved it. He had small eyes and a strong jaw. He was somewhat undersized, and his body was lean and hard. This afternoon, clad in a well-cut flannel suit, and wearing a straw hat, he sat on the steps of a bathing-machine on the beach at Helmstone. He was waiting for the man inside the machine to come out. Meanwhile he made himself a cigarette, rolling it on his leg with one hand, and securing the paper by a small miracle instead of by gum.

As he lit the cigarette the door of the bathing-machine opened, and a tall young man of athletic build came out. He was no better dressed than James Smith. At the same time, it was just as obvious that he was a gentleman as that Smith was not.

“Hallo!” said the young man. “You’re

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all right again, I see. What was it—touch of cramp?”

“No, sir,” said Smith. “I’m not a strong swimmer, and I’ve done no sea bathing before. I never meant to get out of my depth, but the current took me. What I want now is to do something to show my gratitude.”

“Gratitude be blowed!” said the young man cheerfully. “It was no trouble to me, and I happened to be there.”

“Well, sir,” said Smith, “will you let me give you a dog? I’ve got some very good dogs. I should take it as a favour if you would.”

He took from a Russia leather case a clean professional card, and presented it to the young man.

“That, of course, is not my real name. That’s just the French name they’ve put on the programmes. I’m James Smith, and I have a two weeks’ engagement at the Hippodrome here. I’ve got my dogs in a stable not far from there.”

The young man glanced at his watch.

“Well,” he said, “I’ve got nothing to do this morning, I’ll go and have a look at the dogs, at any rate. They’re a pretty clever lot, I suppose.”

“They can do what they’ve been taught,” said Smith; “all except one of them, and he can do what no man can teach him.”

There was a great noise when they entered the stables. Twenty dogs, most of them black poodles, all tried to talk at once. Smith said

something decisively, but quietly, and the dogs became silent again. Smith made a sign to one of the poodles and held out his walking-stick. It looked quite impossible, but the dog went over it.

"My word, but that's a wonderful jump!" said the young man.

"It is," said Smith. "You won't find another dog of that breed in this country that can do the same. He's yours, if you like to take him."

"No; hang it all! I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to take a dog which you can use professionally. What about the beggar that you said you could not teach?"

Smith pointed to a huge brindled bulldog, who lay in one corner of the stable absolutely motionless, watching them intently.


"That's the one," he said. "He's never been on the stage at all. He couldn't even be taught to fetch and carry."

"And you just keep him because you're fond of him?"

"Fond of him? No, I'm not fond of dogs. They're my livelihood, and I don't do so badly out of it. But I'm not fond of 'em—know too much about 'em."

"Then what do you keep him for?"

"You may call it a sense of justice, or you may call it curiosity. He's a rum 'un, that dog is, and no mistake."

 "In what way rum?"

"I'll tell you. He's a dog that sees dangers ahead. He knows when things are going to

happen. I had him as a puppy, and when I found I could teach him nothing, I made up my mind to get quit of him. I was going off by train that day to a village fifteen miles away, and I knew a man there who I thought might take a fancy to Zero."

"Zero, you call him?"

"Yes; that was a bit of my fun. As a performing dog he was just absolutely last—number naught, see? Well, as I was saying, there was I on the platform with the dog at my heel and the ticket in my hand. Just as I was going to get into the train, he made a jump for that ticket, caught it in his mouth and bolted with it, nipping in among a lot of milk-cans. I called him, and he wouldn't come out. Then I went in after him, and he bolted again. By the time I did get him I had missed my train, and I didn't give him half a jolly good hiding for it, I don't think! If I'd gone by that train I shouldn't have been talking to you now. Collision three miles from the station. Well, you don't apologize to a dog. All I could do was to keep him. But that wasn't the only instance. The beggar knows things."

"Apparently he didn't know that you were going to drown yourself this morning."

"If he knew anything about it, he knew that I wasn't."

"Good-tempered dog?"

"Oh, all bulldogs are safe! You want to look after him with collies. He doesn't like 'em. If he gets hold of one, it's bad for

the collie. Otherwise a baby could handle him."

Zero had crossed over to them, and the young man stooped down and patted him. The dog expressed delight.

"I can send him round to your hotel," said Smith; "or, for that matter, he'd follow you. He's taken a fancy to you, he has."

"Look here," said the young man, "let me buy him. I'm not a millionaire, but I can afford to buy a dog. I'd like to have this one, and there's no reason on earth why you should give him to me."

"You'd like to have him, and I can afford to give him to you, and I want to give him to you. You must let a man indulge his sense of gratitude. It's only fair."

"Very well, if you say so. Many thanks. I'll step over to the Hippodrome and see your show to-night."

"Do. You'll be surprised."

The two men talked for a few moments longer, and then Zero's new owner said that he must be getting back to lunch.

"You really think the dog will follow me?" he said. "I don't want to take a lead?"

"I know he'll follow you. I tell you I know dogs. They take fancies sometimes. You can take that dog out, and if I call him back myself he wouldn't come."

"I bet you a sovereign he would."

"I'll take that," said Smith. "You go on with him, and I'll wait here."

The young man walked a few yards away

with the dog at his heels, and then Smith called the dog back, loudly and insistently. The dog did not give the slightest sign that he had heard anything at all. When his master stood still, he remained standing patiently at his heel, and never once looked back.

The young man laughed as he took out his sovereign-case.

“Queer chap, Zero. Well, you’ve won, Mr. Smith. Catch!”

Mr. Smith caught the sovereign adroitly, and went back into the stable.

“Yes,” he said to the cleverest of the black poodles, “I don’t know that I wouldn’t sooner he’d taken you.”

It was seldom that Smith addressed any of his dogs, except to give an order. The poodle did not know what to make of it. He whined faintly.

Richard Staines went back to his hotel, with Zero at his heels. He had his own sitting-room opening into his bedroom at the hotel, and he intended to keep the dog there at night. This was against the laws of the hotel; therefore Staines had to pause a few moments in the hall to get the laws altered. One of the arguments he used was that he would only be there two days longer, and it would not matter for so short a time. The other argument was bribery and corruption. After which he and Zero went up in the lift together.

Z E R O

CHAPTER II

STAINES was a partner in succession to his father in an old-established firm of stock-brokers with a good connexion. He had a small flat in St. James's Place, and thither he brought Zero. Zero accepted metropolitan life philosophically. There was a dingy cat in the basement of St. James's Place, and he was quite willing to make friends with her. He looked mildly puzzled at her definite assurance that she would kill him if he came a step nearer. It never occurred to him to attempt to injure her. But for one slight lapse—he had killed a collie, and cost Staines compensation—his behaviour was admirable. He was fortunate in having a master who was fond of outdoor life, and not at all fond of London. Every week-end, and occasionally on a fine afternoon, if business was slack, he got away into the country. He never quite seemed to understand the terror which his appearance inspired in some young or foolish people. When children rushed from him shrieking, he would look up at his master as much as to say, "Can you understand this?" And he was careful not to increase their terror by running after them.

One day in the Park a muddy-faced little girl of six, who feared nothing at all, came up and patted him, examined his teeth with

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curious interest, and finally sat on him. These attentions Zero received with great joy. Weeks passed, and he had not given the slightest sign of the curious instinct with which his former master had credited him.

Staines liked him, principally because he so obviously liked Staines. Staines thought him a faithful and affectionate beast, with nothing to distinguish him from the normal. When he recalled Smith's story of the snatched railway ticket, he explained it all as a chance. These flukes did happen sometimes.

And then one afternoon he went to call upon the Murrays—a practice that was becoming rather common with him—and as Jane was particularly fond of Zero, Zero accompanied him. When they reached the square, Zero sat down on the pavement. Staines called him, and the dog wagged his tail, but did not move. Staines went on without him, but presently had to stop, for Zero had now changed his tactics, and was running round and round Staines' legs. The incident of the railway ticket flashed across his mind. He was a business man, and not superstitious; however, it did not matter to him in the least which two sides of the square he took, and he determined to turn back and take the other two sides, and see what would happen. As soon as he turned back, Zero followed at heel in his usual quiet and unobtrusive manner.

A loud crash caused him to look round. A heavy stone coping had fallen from a roof, and if the dog had not brought him back it

Z E R O

would have fallen upon him. Here was a nice little story with a mildly sensational interest for Staines to tell over the teacups.

Mr. Murray was matter-of-fact.

"Your story is true, of course," he said. "Your dog did make you take the other two sides of the square, and the fact that you turned back probably saved your life. But, all the same, the dog didn't know. By what means could the brain of a dog recognize the imminent dissolution of part of the roof of a house?"

"Zero did know," said Jane. She was Mr. Murray's only daughter, and without being wildly beautiful, was an extremely pleasing and friendly young woman to look at. At present she was feeding Zero with thin bread-and-butter. Zero had been told, even by Jane herself, that this form of diet was bad for his figure, but he accepted it with resignation—rather an enthusiastic kind of resignation.

"What makes you say that Zero knew?" her father asked, with indulgent superiority.

"Because I know he knew," said Jane firmly and finally.

"And then," said Mr. Murray, "women tell us they ought to have the vote."

"Miss Murray," said Richard firmly, "that dog is not to be fed any more, please."

"Last piece," said Jane. "And he's promised to do Swedish exercises."

Richard was inclined to agree with Mr. Murray. The coincidence was again remarkable; it might even be called very extra-

ordinary. And, given a choice of two things, Richard preferred to believe the easier. Why, fond though he was of Zero, he had to admit that the dog was not even clever.

He had tried to teach Zero to find a hidden biscuit, but though he had hidden the biscuit in all manner of places he had never yet selected a place that Zero had been able to discover. He was just a dear old fool of a bulldog, and it was absurd to suppose that he was a miracle.

But Jane Murray remained firm in her belief, and even condescended to be serious about it.

"Look here," she said, "if you put your horse at a jump, and you're feeling a bit shy of it yourself, do you mean to say the horse doesn't know?"

"Of course he knows. But he only knows it by the way you ride him."

"Well, I've had it happen to me. All I can say is that I wasn't conscious of riding any differently. It was my first season in Ireland, and I wasn't used to the walls. I said to myself, 'It's got to be.' I did really mean to get over. But the horse knew the funk in my heart and refused. However, I'll give you another point. How do you explain the homing instinct of animals?"

"I've never thought about it. I suppose when a pigeon gets up high it can see no end of a distance."

"That won't do. Dogs and cats have the same instinct—especially cats. For that

matter, crabs have been taken from the sea and returned to it again at a point eighty miles away, and have found their way back. It's not done by sight, scent, or hearing. It must be done by some special sense which they have got and we have not."

"It sounds plausible."

"It's the only possible explanation. And when once we've admitted that animals have a special sense which we have not, I don't quite see how we are to say what the limitations of that sense are. It is not really a bit more wonderful that Zero should have the sense of impending danger than that a crab, eighty miles from home, should be able to find its way back."

"Well, you may be right. I wish now that I'd asked that chap Smith a bit more about the dog."

A few days later one of the partners in Richard's business announced his intention of getting married. He was a junior partner, two years younger than Richard.

"Well, Bill," said Richard, after he had offered his congratulations, "what shall I give you for a wedding-present?"

"Give us that dog of yours."

"Never. Try again."

"Oh, I was only rotting. But, seriously, I'd as soon have a dog as anything. Not a bulldog—they're too ugly."

"It's a good, honest kind of ugliness. What breed then?"

"Gwen's keen on black poodles."

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That settled it. Richard hunted up Smith's card. He had always meant to do some business with the man if he got an opportunity, and here was the opportunity. On the following day he journeyed to Wandsworth and found Smith. Smith looked less spruce and prosperous than before. He did not actually declare that the performing dog had had his day, but he admitted that business was not what it had been.

"Too many of us in it. And, I tell you, I'm afraid to bring out a new idea—it's pinched before you've had a week's use of it. Public's a bit off it, too. I'm doing practically nothing with the 'alls. I train for others, and I'm trying to build up a business as a dealer. Only first-class dogs, mind."

"That's what I want. I came here to buy a dog."

"Let's see. Bulldogs were your fancy. Well, I've got one of the Stone breed that's won the only time it was shown and will win again."

"This is not for myself. It's a present. Black poodle."

"I see. Well, you've come to the right market. How far were you prepared to go?"

"Show me a really valuable dog and I will pay the real value. I'm not buying for the show-bench; but I want the best breed, good health, good temper, cleverness, and training—two years old for choice."

"Ask enough," said Smith, smiling. "Well, if you don't mind stepping into the yard I

Z E R O

can fit you. I'm asking twenty guineas, and he's worth every penny of it—he'd bring that money back, to anybody who cared to take it, before a year was out."

The dog was shown—an aristocrat with qualities of temper and intelligence not always to be found in the aristocrat. Richard Staines thought he would be paying quite enough, but decided to pay it. He returned to the house to write his cheque.

"There you are, Mr. Smith. By the way, do you remember Zero, the dog you gave me? He's sitting in my taxi outside."

"I remember him. He'd never win prizes for anybody—not like that poodle you've just bought. You couldn't teach him anything either. But he could see ahead, that dog could."

Smith heard how Richard Staines had been saved from the falling roof, and evinced no surprise at it at all. "Yes," he said, "that dog always knew. Did I tell you about the milk?"

"No. What was that?"

"Me and Cowbit next door got our milk from the same man. I went out one morning to take the can in, when Zero came bullocking past me and knocked the can over. He never tried to drink the milk that was spilled, but just stood there, wagging his old tail. Mind you, sir, that was after he had saved me from the train smash. 'Well,' I said to him, 'I suppose you know'; and I went in to Cowbits' to tell them not to touch that milk.

Cowbit laughed at the story, and took milk in his tea. But his missus wouldn't have any, and wouldn't let the baby have none either. Cowbit was ill for days and pretty near died. Mineral poison it was, from one of the milk-pans going wrong."

"How do you suppose the dog knew?"

"Me suppose? Why, I never asked myself the question. He did know—that was all about it. Still, if I had to explain it, I should say it was some kind of an instinct."

And Richard mercifully forbore to ask Mr. Smith how he would explain that particular kind of instinct.

CHAPTER III

RICHARD was best-man at his partner's wedding. He afterwards attended a crowded reception. It was too crowded ; and there were far too many people there who wanted to talk to Jane Murray. She was popular, and there was a group round her all the time. Not for five minutes could Richard get her to himself. It was this selfishness on the part of others which depressed him, not the reception champagne, which was no worse than is usual on such occasions.

The crowds bored him and when he got back to his flat the solitude bored him. Not even Zero was there. Richard's valet had taken the dog out for exercise ; this had been done in obedience to Richard's own orders, but it now seemed to him in the light of a grievance. The grievance became more acute when his servant returned without the dog.

"Very sorry, sir ; I wouldn't have had it happen for anything. I was walking in Regent's Park, with the dog at my heels, and all of a sudden he made a bolt for it. I whistled and called, but he went straight on. And when I started running after him, he made a dash into a big shrubbery. That was how he foxed me, sir. While I was hunting him on one side, he must have bolted out on the other. Never known the dog act like that

before. It was just as if something had come over him. Speaking in a general way——”

“Well, what did you do?” asked Richard sharply.

“I spoke to the park-keepers, and to a couple of policemen outside, and then I went on to Scotland Yard. The address is on the collar, sir. I should think there’s no doubt you’ll——”

“That’ll do!” snapped Richard. “I thought you could be trusted to take a dog out, at any rate. Well, my mistake.”

With a further expression of contrition, the man withdrew, and almost instantly the telephone-bell on Richard’s desk rang sharply.

He went slowly to the telephone, and managed to put the concentration of weariness and disgust into the word “Hallo!”

The voice that answered him was the voice of Mr. Murray.

“That you, Staines? . . . Right—yes, quite well, thanks. . . . I wanted to say when Jane got back this evening she found Zero waiting for her outside our front door. . . . He’s here now, and seems quite cheerful about it. . . . Thought you might like to know.”

Richard rapidly changed his tone of dejection for that of social enthusiasm. He thanked profusely. He would send for the dog at once.

“Well, look here,” said Mr. Murray, “Jane and I have got a night off—dining alone. If by any chance you’re free, I wish you’d join us. Then you can take the intelligent hound back with you.”

Richard said that he was free, which was a lie ; and that he would be delighted to come, which was perfectly true.

He subsequently rang up a man at his club, cancelled an engagement on the score of ill-health, and went to dress. Such was his elation that he even condescended to tell his servant that the dog had been found and was all right.

Zero had done wrong. He must have known that he had done wrong ; but he welcomed his master with gambols in the manner of an ecstatic bullock, and showed no sign of penitence at all. It was the habit of Richard to punish a dog that had done wrong, but he did not punish Zero. He called him a silly old idiot, and asked him what he thought he had been doing, but Zero recognized that this was badinage and exercised his tail furiously.

At dinner, Mr. Murray said that Zero was an interesting problem. The dog was apparently a fine judge at sight of the stability of structures, but could not find his way home.

"That's not proved," said Richard, laughing. "He knew his way home all right, but he was trying to better himself. He's not fed at tea-time in St. James's Place."

"He's had nothing here," said Jane.

"Really, Jane," said her father.

"Practically nothing. A few biscuits and the least little bit of wedding-cake for luck."

"Pity I didn't take him to the reception ; then he could have had a vanilla ice as well."

"Wrong," said Jane. "They hadn't got

vanilla—only the esoteric sorts. I know, because I tried. Never you mind, Zero. When the election comes on, you shall wear papa's colours round your strengthy neck and kill all the collies of the opposition."

"By the way," said Richard, "how's old Benham?"

"Poor old chap, he's still dying," said Mr. Murray. "It makes me feel a bit like a vulture, waiting for his death like this. Still, I suppose it can't be helped."

Benham was the sitting member for Sidlington, and Mr. Murray had been predestined to succeed him. Murray had fought two forlorn hopes for his party, and had pulled down majorities. He had fairly earned Sidlington—an absolutely safe seat. He had moderate means and no occupation. He had taken up with politics ten years before—shortly after the death of his wife—and had found politics a game that precisely suited him.

The discussion for the remainder of dinner was mostly political, and Jane—as was generally the case when she chose to be serious—showed herself to be a remarkably well-informed and intelligent young woman.

"I've no chance; she's too good for me," said Richard to himself—by no means for the first time—as he looked at her and listened to her with admiration.

Jane had just left the two men to their cigars when a servant entered with a card for Mr. Murray.

"Where have you put him?" he asked the man.

"The gentleman is in the library, sir."

"Good! Say I'll be with him directly. Awfully sorry, Staines; this is a chap from Sidlington, and rather an important old cock down there."

"Go to him, of course. That's all right."

"I'm afraid I must. But here's the port and here's the cigars. When you get tired of solitude, you'll find Jane in the drawing-room. Smoking's allowed there, you know."

Staines got tired of solitude very soon. In the drawing-room the conversation between Jane and himself took a new note of earnestness and intimacy. Zero slept placidly through it all.

An hour later Mr. Murray came back to the drawing-room with the news of Benham's death. He in return received, with goodwill and no surprise, the news that a marriage had been arranged, and would shortly take place, between his daughter and Richard Staines.

CHAPTER IV

DURING the engagement, which was brief, Zero found that two people—of whom his master was one—had very little time to talk to him ; but he was not absolutely forgotten.

“ What are we to do with Zero while we’re away ? ” asked Richard.

“ Could we take him with us ? ” asked Miss Murray.

“ I don’t think so,” said Richard. “ There would be bother at these foreign hotels ; and there’s the quarantine to think about.”

“ Suppose I said that if Zero didn’t go, I wouldn’t go either ? ”

“ Quite simple. In that case, I should go alone.”

And then they both laughed, being somewhat easily pleased at that time. Zero was offered to Mr. Murray temporarily as an election mascot, but Mr. Murray was not taking any risks—one of his principal supporters had a favourite collie. Finally, it was decided that Zero should pay a visit to his former master, Smith, until his master returned. He made one brief appearance at the wedding reception, where his supreme but honest ugliness conquered the heart of every nice woman present. He refused champagne, foie-gras sandwiches, and vanilla ices offered to him by the enthusiastic and indiscreet. However,

he managed to find Jane, and Jane found bread-and-butter until word was brought that a person of the name of Smith had called for the dog.

"Bit fat, you are," said Smith, as he ripped the white rosette off the dog's collar. "Been doing yourself too well. Ah, now you're going to live healthy!"

Smith was as good as his word. Zero was sufficiently and properly fed, and given plenty of exercise. He mixed with some very aristocratic canine society, where the sweetness of his temper was much commended and imposed upon. After two months his master called for him, and Zero once more behaved like an ecstatic bullock.

"Yes," said Smith, "he's in good condition, as you say. Otherwise, he's not much changed. He's as big a fool as ever he was. If a toy Pom growls at him, he runs away; and if a collie tries to get past him alive—well, it can't. He'd tear the throat out of any man as struck you, and if the cat next door spits at him he goes and hides in the rhubarb."

"Seen any more of that wonderful instinct of his?"

"No, sir, I have not. But I should have done if there had been any occasion for it. It's a fact that I never feel so safe as I do when I've got that dog here. Don't you believe in it yourself, sir?"

"Sometimes I do—Mrs. Staines does absolutely. If there's nothing in it, then there

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has been the most extraordinary lot of coincidences I ever came across."

Richard Staines and his wife had agreed that they would live principally in the country, and one day during their engagement Jane took Richard down to Selsdon Bois to show him the house of her dreams, known to the Post Office as Midway. Then, when he came to select, he would know the kind of thing to look for. Jane had known Midway in her childhood, and had loved its wide and gentle staircases, its fine Jacobean panelling, its stone roof, and its old garden with the paved walks between yew hedges.

"Well," said Richard, "if you are so keen on the place, why shouldn't we wait for a chance to get it, instead of looking for something more or less like it?"

"Because you can't," said Jane. "We're general public, and general public is never allowed to buy a place like Midway. People live in it till they die, and then leave it to the person they love best, and that person lives in it till he dies. And so on again. It never comes into the market. Things that are really valuable hardly ever do."

The conversation took place in the train which was conveying them to Selsdon Bois.

"Ah, well," said Richard, "what is there? It needn't be very big to be too big for us."

"Not a big house at all. I never counted, but I should think about twenty rooms." She made guesses as to acreage of garden, orchard, and grass-land. She admitted that

they were merely guesses. "The only thing that I really remember is that it was thirty-six acres in all. Could we do it?"

"Yes," said Richard; "we ought to be able to do that."

"Still, it doesn't matter," said Jane despondently, "because, of course, places like that are never to be got."

Then they stepped out on to the platform of Selsdon Bois Station, where a man was busily pasting up a bill. It announced the sale by auction, unless previously disposed of, of Midway.

"Miracle!" said Jane, subsiding gracefully on to a milk-can. "It's ours!"

And a fortnight later it was really theirs. The house was as delightful as Jane had said, but it was an old house, and during the last ten years had not been well kept up. There was a good deal to be done to make it quite comfortable and satisfactory. The work was to have been finished by the time Richard and his wife returned from the honeymoon.

"It's been simply funny the way we've been kept back," said the builder cheerfully. "But you might be able to get in, say, in another week or so."

They remained for a month in town, and this gave Jane time to discover that it was not possible to teach Zero to do trust-and-paid-for, and to look up a really admirable train by which Richard might travel from Selsdon Bois to the city every weekday morning.

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"Yes," said Richard a little doubtfully, "it's quite a good train, but——"

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing. I shall probably take it whenever I go up, though it's a bit earlier than is absolutely necessary. You see, I don't regard my presence at the office as so essential as I once did. My partners are most able and trustworthy men, and they like the work. Of course, I shall keep an eye on things."

"Then how many days a week will you go up?"

"Well, just at first I shall go up—er—from time to time."

"Come here, Zero," said Jane. "See that man? He's idle. Kill him!"

"Idle? Why, I shall have any amount of things to do down at Midway! Gardeners and grooms want a deal of looking after at first, until they pick up the way you want things done. Then there's that car your father gave us. I've got to learn how to drive it; I've got to know all about its blessed works right up to the very last word. The man who don't is open to be robbed and fooled by his chauffeur. That won't be done in a week. Then I've had an idea that we might lay out a golf-course—quite a small affair, just for practice."

"Richard, you're a genius! (You needn't bite him after all, Zero.) That will be the very thing for guests on Sunday afternoons—not to mention us ourselves."

Z E R O

“ I was thinking principally of us ourselves.”

“ Where is that big-scale plan of the land ? We'll pin it down flat on the table, and start arranging it now. We shall probably have to alter it all afterwards, but that don't matter.”

CHAPTER V

SIX years had passed ; and Zero had got a new master, a somewhat dictatorial gentleman, but with genuine goodness of heart, aged five, bearing the same name as his father, Richard Staines, but never by any chance addressed by it. His father called him Dick. His mother called him by various fond and foolish appellations. He was known to the servants of the household as the Emperor. He had two sisters, whom he always spoke of collectively as "the children." He always spoke of Zero as "my dog."

Zero was rather an old dog now, but hale and hearty. In his own circle he was highly valued, but his formidable appearance still struck terror among strangers, willing though he was to make friends with them. The tradespeople, who had at first approached very delicately, had now grown used to him ; but the tramp or hawker who entered the garden at Midway, and found Zero looking at him pensively, as a rule retired quickly to see if the road was still there. No further instance had occurred of Zero's mysterious powers, and in consequence they tended to become legendary. Richard Staines had now definitely adopted the theory of coincidence.

"Zero's a good old friend of mine, and I love him," he said ; "but we must give up

pretending he's a miracle." Jane's faith, however, remained unshaken.

And then, one summer evening, Dick came into the drawing-room with determination in his face.

"Mother," he said, "I want a stick or whip, please."

"Well, now," said Jane, "what for?"

"To beat my dog with. He's got to be punished."

"That's a pity, Dickywick. What's he been doing?"

"He won't let me go out into the road. Every time he caught hold of my coat and pulled me back. He's most frightfully strong, and he pulled me over once. He wants a lamming."

"I wonder if he would let me go out," said Jane. "Let's go and see, shall we?"

"Right-oh," said Dick, perfectly satisfied.

In the garden they found Zero cheerful and quite unrepentant. As a rule, he rushed to the gate in the hopes of being taken out for a run. But this evening, as Jane neared the gate, he became disquieted. He caught hold of her dress and tried to drag her back. He ran round and round her, whimpering. He flung himself in front of her feet.

"Now, you see," said Dick triumphantly.

"Yes, I see."

"Well, I shall go and fetch a stick."

"Oh, no. Zero does not want us to go out because he believes there's some danger on the road."

“O-o-oh! Do you really mean it?”

“Honest Injun.”

“Then he’s not a bad dog at all and I told him he was. Come here, Zero.” He patted the dog’s head. “You’re a good dog really. My mistake. Sorry. What are you laughing at, mother? That’s what Tom always says. Now let’s go and see the danger on the road.”

“Well, it wouldn’t be quite fair to Zero, after all the trouble he’s taken. Besides, I want to see the rabbits at their games. They ought to be out just now.”

“All right,” said Dick. “You follow me, and I’ll show you them. But you mustn’t make the least sound. You must be very Red-Indian.”

Dick’s mother followed him obediently, and was very Red-Indian. The rabbits lived in a high bank just beyond the far end of the garden, and what the gardener had said about them before the wire-netting came could not be printed. Jane watched the rabbits, and conversed about them in the hoarse whisper enjoined by her son, but she was thinking principally about Zero.

Then Dick went to bed, and his father came back from the city. He went up at least one day a week, and came back full of aggressive virtue and likely to refer to himself as a man who earned his own living, thank Heaven.

At dinner Richard said: “By the way, I’d been meaning to speak of it—what’s the matter with Zero?”

“Why?”

"He won't leave the gate. He was there when I drove in. I called him in, but he went back almost directly. I saw him through the window as I was dressing, and he was still there—lying quite still, with his eyes glued on the road."

And then Jane recounted the experience of Dick and herself.

"You may laugh, Richard, but something is going to happen, and Zero knows what it will be."

"Well," said Richard, "if anybody is proposing to burglarize us to-night, I don't envy him the preliminaries with Zero. But, of course, it may be nothing. All the same I've always said there ought to be a lodge at that gate."

But to this Jane was most firmly opposed. A new semi-artistic red-brick lodge would be out of keeping with Midway altogether. "And what are you going to do about Zero?"

"Oh, anything you like. What do you propose?"

"I don't know what to say. Whatever is going to happen, apparently Zero thinks he can tackle it by himself. Still, you might have your revolver somewhere handy to-night."

"I will," said Richard.

Zero remained at his post until the dawn, and then came a black speck on the white road. Zero stood up and growled. The skin on his back moved.

Down the road came the lean, black retriever, snapping aimlessly, foam dropping

from his jaws. Zero sprang at him and was thrown down and bitten. At his second spring he got hold and kept it. The two dogs rolled off the road, and into the ditch.

At breakfast, next morning, Richard was innocuously humorous on the subject of revolvers, burglars, and clairvoyant bulldogs. He was interrupted by a servant, who announced that Mr. Hammond wished to speak to him for a moment.

"Right," said Richard. "Where is he?"

"He is just outside, sir," said the man. "Mr. Hammond would not come in."

Hammond was a neighbour of Richard's, a robust and heavily built man. As a rule he was a cheerful sportsman, but this morning his countenance was troubled. His clothes were covered with dust, and he looked generally dishevelled.

"Hallo, Jim," said Richard cheerily. "How goes it? You look as if you'd been out all night."

"I have," said Hammond grimly. "So have several other men."

"Why? What's up?"

"Outbreak of rabies at Barker's farm. He shot one of the dogs, but the other got away. There must have been some damned mismanagement. A lot of us have been out trying to find the brute all night."

"But, by Jove, this is most awfully serious. Can't I help? I'm ready to start now if you like."

"Thanks, but I found the dog five minutes

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ago—dead in a ditch not twenty yards from your gate. He's there still."

"Who shot him?"

"Nobody. That's the trouble. He had been killed by another dog, as you'll see when you look at his windpipe. The chances are the other dog got bitten or scratched, and he'll carry on the infection. It's the other dog we've got to hunt."

"Could it be——" Richard paused.

"I'm afraid so," said Hammond. "Not many dogs would tackle a mad retriever, but your bulldog would. And it was close to your gate that the retriever was killed."

"If you'll wait half a minute, I'll see where Zero is."

But the dog was not to be found. Nobody had seen him that morning. In truth, Richard had not expected to find him. He left word that if the dog came back he was to be shut up in an empty stable. And then he and Hammond went out together.

"You've got a revolver, I suppose," said Richard.

"I don't hunt mad dogs without one. This is most awfully hard lines on you, Richard. He was a ripping good dog, Zero was."

"He was. It's Dick I'm thinking about. The dog was a great pal of his."

They found young Barker watching by the dead retriever. He explained gloomily that he had sent a boy for a cart. The body would be taken back and buried in lime. "And even then, sir, we've not got the dog that killed him."

"We're just going to get him," said Richard quietly.

They walked on in silence for a mile and then at a turn of the road they saw Zero, apparently asleep in the sunlight in the white dust.

"I ought to do this," said Richard, "but I wish you would."

"Right, old chap. It'll be over in a moment, and he'll be dead before he knows he's hurt. Look the other way."

Richard turned round and waited, as it seemed to him, for a long time, expecting the shot. Suddenly he heard Hammond's voice behind him.

"No need to shoot. The poor beggar's dead—been run over by a motor-car, I should say. It's a lucky accident."

"I wonder," said Richard.

"Wonder what?"

"Wonder if it was really an accident."

WILMAY

CHAPTER I

PHILIP AMORY was only twenty years old when he decided to leave England. He had no relations to consult, and his guardian never opposed him in anything; but his friends—of which in spite of his eccentricities he had many—were indignant. He was leaving Cambridge in the middle of his career there, and the career had promised to be very brilliant. He was going to Queensland, and Queensland is a long way off. I told him that if he went there he might just as well die, and on the whole I should prefer the death. What made it more irritating was that he never gave one solid reason for going to Queensland, or even for leaving England at all. A man's friends can hardly allow him to make a fool of himself without providing themselves with some plausible explanation, and accordingly we said that there was a woman in the case. It was not a very satisfactory explanation, because, if there was a woman in the case, we certainly did not know who the woman was.

At first he wrote to me frequently. Then at the end of six months of silence I got one

long letter from him, of which the first half was all about horse-breaking, to which he seemed to have given much attention, while the remainder was occupied with a proposal for a new reading in a passage in one of the "Agamemnon" choruses. To this letter there was a postscript, "I have married." He did not say whom he had married, or give any other information. I wrote to inquire and to congratulate, and sent him silver candlesticks.

He never answered that letter or acknowledged the present. I had no further news of him until a little more than a year afterwards, when I happened to see in a paper the announcement of the death of his wife. I wrote to express my sympathy, and he never answered that letter either. I made allowance for his erratic nature, but my patience was considerably tried. Years went by, and then one day I got a short note from him :

"DEAR EDWARD,—You never told me what you thought of that reading in the 'Agamemnon' which I proposed to you. I wish you would. Do you happen to want to buy—or to know anybody who wants to buy—a quantity of precious opals? Try to answer this at once.—Yours ever,

"PHILIP AMORY."

To this I replied :

"DEAR PHIL,—Since you first wrote on the 'Agamemnon,' I have forgotten my Greek, but without acquiring in its place any desire to

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buy opals, or any knowledge of any one with that desire. You have treated me abominably, and eccentricity does not excuse you. Come back to England, and I will forgive you—but correspondence with you is hopeless.—Yours ever,

“EDWARD DERRIMER.”

One more year passed, and then one morning a letter was brought me with the post-mark of Ayshurst, a little Buckinghamshire village. It ran :

“DEAR EDWARD,—You declined—rightly, I think—to correspond with me. My faults as a correspondent are due to several causes. I write letters which I afterwards forget to post. I do not send news of myself, because it is impossible for me to realize that people must be told things about me which I do not require to be told about myself. Also, I have been very busy. However, you said that if I returned to England you would forgive me, and I have returned. I am thirty-two years old, and I have done my roaming. I shall not leave England again.

“I have bought Sinden, and settled here with Wilmay. You remember that I once told you at Cambridge that I knew of a little spot which I meant to buy one day. That was Sinden—an Elizabethan house and about forty acres of freehold. The garden is a dream. Wilmay and I want you to come down to-morrow and stay for any period not less than one lunar month. For the

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sake of old times come, and bring my absolution with you.—Yours ever,

“PHILIP AMORY.”

“P.S.—Wilmay is the child. Now, that’s a case in point. How was I to realize that you require to be told that, when I never require to be told it myself?”

I hesitated, but the appeal to old times decided me. I wrote him a long letter, abused him for all his little failings, and said that I would most certainly come on the morrow, and my train would arrive at seven in the evening.

* * * *

As I stood on the platform, watching the receding train that I had just missed, I suppose that I felt and spoke like an angry man, for the porter mildly suggested that it was not his fault, and that he did not make the trains.

“How long is it to the next? Half an hour?”

“Full an hour.”

I thought of putting off my visit until the morrow rather than dislocate my host’s dinner-hour. But my bag was packed, and it did not seem worth while to go back after I had once started. To fill in the time I strolled out into the street, found a telegraph office, and sent off ninepence-halfpennyworth of my best apologies to Philip. Then it occurred

to me that I might buy a present for Wilmay. It was characteristic that even now Philip had never mentioned whether Wilmay was a boy or a girl, but at ten years old the sexes have much in common. I paused at a shop where they sold French chocolates, and bought enough to account satisfactorily for my existence to Wilmay—boy or girl. Children mostly like you to produce some such evidence that your life is not quite purposeless.

I found Philip waiting for me on the station platform at Ayshurst. It was twelve years since we had met, and our conversation at first was, while his servant was looking after my luggage, incoherent—a volley of mixed questions and answers. His dog-cart was waiting outside the station, but Sinden was within ten minutes' distance, and at my suggestion we walked. Philip was wonderfully little changed by twelve years, as far as personal appearance went. He had looked, perhaps, older than his years at twenty; at thirty-two he looked younger than he was. He was a handsome man—tall, dark, clean-shaven, with the build of an athlete. He occasionally made little gestures while he talked—a habit, by the way, which he had never had while we were at Cambridge.

“Well,” I said, as we walked, “you don't look old enough to be the father of a child of ten.”

“Yes,” he said, “Wilmay is ten.”

“And is Wilmay a boy or a girl?”

"A girl, of course. Upon my soul, you don't know the simplest things."

I made the obvious retort, and he tried further to explain his erratic and abominable conduct.

"I know I should have written more often and told you about myself. But then some of your letters absolutely demanded an answer, and that sort I never can answer, and I wasn't always interesting enough to write about. Oh ! look here, you shall ask me anything you like at dinner. I will make up all arrears of information then. By the way, do you like children ? "

"You remind me of a girl who once asked me if I liked poetry. There are children and children."

"Well, yes ; Wilmay is the other kind."

A short avenue of limes brought us up to the front door. My luggage had already arrived, and had been taken up to my room. The man who unpacked it took out four largish boxes of chocolate, and placed them with solemnity in a regular line on the table. You get a good deal of chocolate for a pound or so. I selected a box which was covered with purple satin, and had a heart in gold on the top.

"Do you know if Miss Wilmay has gone to bed ? " I asked.

"I believe not, sir. I will inquire for you."

He brought back word that she had not yet gone to bed.

“Then would you have this box taken to her, from Mr. Derrimer, with his love?”

That was the introductory or ingratiating offering. I reserved two boxes with which to revivify my popularity from time to time, and one as a farewell offering. The man brought back a message that Miss Wilmay desired to thank me very much for the present and the message.

CHAPTER II

PHILIP AMORY and I were alone at dinner. He talked delightfully, told stories by the dozen, described bush life and mining life, told me a heap of those little interesting things that travellers forget to put in their books, but told me nothing at all about himself. I thought, perhaps, that he was waiting until the servants had gone. But even then he told me very little, and I hardly liked to accept his invitation to question him. I knew that he had married, and that his wife had died a little more than a year afterwards, shortly after Wilmay's birth. It was quite possible that even after a lapse of ten years he might feel himself unable to speak of that time. However, he did refer to it once, as we sat smoking in the library.

"Why don't you get married?" he asked me.

"That is what Bertha is always saying to me."

Bertha was my worldly sister, Mrs. Enterland, at that time thoroughly enjoying her second year of widowhood. "I can only tell you what I always tell Bertha—that, so far, I have never had the opportunity."

"You have no resolve against it?"

"Those that resolve against it incontinently marry the housemaid and drop out. No, I've no resolve. But I am thirty-two, and I have

escaped so far, and I hope—humbly and with bated breath I hope.”

So far we had both spoken flippantly enough. But now he said, quite seriously, looking away from me, “You are quite right ; never marry. A man who marries, in the way that young men marry, risks loss. It becomes his greatest sorrow to remember his greatest happiness. He wants to curse God and die, and perhaps there are reasons why he cannot die. Never marry, never love.”

There was a long pause. I did not know what to say.

“While I am speaking of this,” he resumed, “I want to say that you sent me two letters, for which I have never thanked you, old man. But I was grateful for those letters, and I should like——”

“It is not necessary. It’s all right. I understand perfectly.”

“Then we will not speak of this again. If a man means to go on, and I mean to go on for another thirty or forty years, and the insurance people seem to think there’s a chance of it—if, I say, a man means to go on, he must, by the time he has passed thirty, have got some sort of control over his own thoughts. He must be able to say to himself, ‘Such-and-such an episode is closed ; you must not think of this ; you must not remember that.’ ”

“Can any man control his own thoughts ? ”

“It is a popular fallacy that he cannot. I do, and many men do. I believe that most

men of my age with the average history—or a history ever so little worse than the average—must either learn to do that, or must go mad. But enough—we will talk of other things.”

Perhaps it was because I had not his facility for putting things out of my mind. Certainly, although we did talk of other things, for some time we spoke with some seriousness and constraint. Gradually we got back to the old manner.

“Do you remember,” he said, “that I wrote to you about some opals? You took that solemnly—at the foot of the letter. It was only my way of conveying to you the news that I was dealing in opals. I had fifteen hundred pounds’ worth of them lying on the big table at which I sat when I wrote to you. But I didn’t mean that I wanted you to find me a market for them.”

“When you write to a man who is in a bad temper, underline anything which is not to be taken seriously, and tell him you’ve done it. Then he may possibly understand you. However, you did well with your opals, if Sinden is the result.”

“Not as well as I should have done. Opals do not fetch their real value yet—they will, but at present they don’t. I tried other things, too, but we needn’t go into the details of my money-grubbing. Not being a Cræsus like yourself, I had to grub, and did grub. It would have been too absurd for Wilmay not to have had anything she wanted. However, it’s over now.”

It is, perhaps, as well that I should explain that I was not a Crœsus. I had an annual income of £1100 a year, and no prospect that it would ever be increased. Indeed, as it was derived in part from the rent of agricultural land, it promised to grow less.

I asked him how long he had been at Sinden.

“I have been here,” he answered, “one week to-day. I have only been in England a fortnight. I had an agent here watching for a chance to buy Sinden for me, and as soon as he cabled to me that he had got it I returned.”

I was rather surprised. There was nothing in the furniture or arrangements of the house which indicated so recent an occupation. There was nothing temporary or makeshift. I said as much, and he explained that he had been lucky in making people do things for him the way he wanted them done. He said that on the next day he and Wilmay would show me the place.

“Tell me about Wilmay,” I said. “What is she like?”

He turned his head, smiled, and told me to see for myself.

I looked round. I had not heard a sound, but the library door opened and Wilmay stood there. After all these years I have but to close my eyes, and I can still see Wilmay as I saw her then—a white figure standing in the dark doorway.

She was in a long white nightgown. Her

feet were bare, exquisitely shaped, looking as if they were made of rose-petals. Her hair, of the palest gold, hung down below her waist. Her deep blue child's eyes were fixed on her father and myself. In one hand she carried the box of chocolates, the other hand was stretched out as she came forward. She had the face of an angel.

"Wilmay," said her father, "this is Edward—Mr. Edward Derrimer."

She shook hands with me without the least shyness.

"Your Uncle Edward," I said, "if I may have that honour, a sort of supernumerary, unofficial uncle."

"I would sooner call you just Edward, if I may. I don't like the word 'uncle,' or the word 'meals,' or 'ulcer,' oh, and there are some other words too! The sound of them is so bad."

"By all means call me Edward. And what am I to call you—Will?"

"Never!" she laughed. "Nobody calls me that. Always Wilmay."

She made herself comfortable in a low lounge chair, and opened the purple box.

"It's so hot to-night, and I couldn't sleep. So I thought I would come downstairs just as I was, and try to find you. I did send a message, but I wanted to thank you myself for this lovely box and the chocolates. How did you know that I liked chocolates?"

"It was a wild guess of mine."

"It was quite right. See, I've eaten half

a row already. If," she added, pensively, "I were to eat four more, I should be ill."

I looked for some proper and conventional display of paternal authority. None came. Her father sat and watched her and me with an amused smile. I therefore took it upon myself to suggest that the box should be closed until the morrow. I did not want to have the death of the child on my conscience.

"Oh no!" she said. "As four would perhaps make me ill, I shan't eat four. I shall eat three."

And she did. Then she said that her father had told her that I was a fine musician.

I suggested some slightly milder term as being more likely to come within a hundred miles of the truth. Philip would have called any man a musician who was capable of playing a Beethoven sonata with any approach to correctness and feeling. It was generous of him, but misleading. But Wilmay was not to be denied. She said that she wanted me to make some music for her.

Philip rose, apparently taking it for granted that I should do what the child wanted.

"We must come into the next room, then," he said. "There's a piano there."

It was a good instrument.

"It was tuned yesterday," said Wilmay, "by a man who smelt of sherry and told me to trot along. 'Trot along' has a bad sound, too."

I sat down to the piano, and did not in the least know what to play. It occurred to me that nursery rhymes might possibly appeal, and I tried some of them. When I had finished Wilmay came up to the piano and said, "Do you know this?" She hummed a scrap of the Tannhäuser March. She hummed in tune.

"Yes," I said.

"Would you please play it?"

"Well," I said, "on a piano you can't—but no matter, I'll do my best."

If she had asked me to give her some idea of a Mendelssohn organ sonata on a penny whistle, Philip would have expected me to comply without a murmur.

When I had finished she put both arms round my neck, kissed me impulsively, said "Good night," and ran out of the room.

"Well," said Philip, when she had gone.

"Yes," I said, "Wilmay is the other kind."

"By the way," I added, when we had gone back to the library and lit our cigars, "I am not a father, and I have no experience of children. At the same time, if I let things pass without comment, I may be made an accessory after the fact, or something equally unpleasant. Do you allow a child of ten to get out of bed and catch her death of cold by wandering about the house with only her nightgown on? Do you allow her to execute that wandering barefooted, when she may tread on a tin-tack, get blood-poisoning, and

die of it? Do you allow her to ruin her health by sitting up until long after eleven, or to shatter what seems at present a quite useful digestion by unrestricted and excessive indulgence in chocolates? Forgive these questions—but I have still some rudiments of a conscience.”

Philip laughed and told me I was an old woman. The night was very warm, and she would not—and knew she would not—catch cold. The floor of the house was not—and she knew it was not—composed of inverted tin-tacks. Also Philip himself regarded it as foolish to stop in bed when you could not sleep. He pointed out that the “excessive indulgence” was not proved, and that it was I who had put the temptation in her way. “But after all,” he said, “I never allow or forbid. In Wilmay’s case it is not necessary, and in the case of almost all children it is nothing like so necessary as is supposed.”

“What? You have theories of the education of children as well as of horse-breaking.”

“I have pretty much the same theory in both cases—the least possible interference with the ordinary development of nature. I have studied wild men and wild horses. I have found in both something valuable that the common method of education and civilization kills.”

“From what I’ve read of primitive people, I should say that generally they were chiefly remarkable for dirtiness, ignorance, and brutality.”

“Well, if you yourself lived among the Esquimaux, or if you were at the mines in a time of bad drought, you would not wash. The struggle for life brings out as much brutality here as you’ll find among the Apaches, but in different forms. But don’t misunderstand me—I did not say no interference with nature at all. I said the least possible. In the case of the horse, the least possible means quite a good deal, though less than is generally supposed. In the case of the child in general, the least possible interference means but little interference.

“But that question of ignorance—children are ignorant, and they don’t want to learn. They have to be made to learn.”

“I answer you in your own words—there are children and children. I’m not trying to push my point to an extreme. I have no illusions about it. There are many children—boys especially—who won’t learn anything if they can help it. But it’s our own fault because we begin by ordering them about and saying, ‘Obey me and learn this,’ when if we could show them that the particular knowledge was to their pleasure and advantage, Nature herself would urge them to acquire it.”

“I know you’ve broken horses. Have you educated children? or is this merely your habit of theorizing?”

“I have more or less educated Wilmay. She could ride long before she could read. She did not begin to learn to read until two years ago. I used to read Hans Andersen to

her. One day it struck her that if she knew how to read, she would be able to read Hans Andersen when I was not there. So she wanted to learn—and did learn with unusual rapidity. Six months ago she decided that she would learn to write.”

“Do you do the actual teaching?”

“No. Wilmay’s woman, Mrs. Blayd, does that. I don’t teach—I only stop other people from teaching until the right time comes. There are no regular lesson-hours for Wilmay—she begins work when she likes and stops when she likes.”

“In fact she does everything she likes—has never learned self-control, or methodical habits, or regard for the feeling of others, and has been absolutely spoiled by her father who sits up of nights inventing theories to cover his own laziness, weakness, and eccentricity.”

He laughed cheerfully. “Wait and see,” he said. “Wilmay’s not faultless, but before you have been here a month you will own that my system is the right system—for her at any rate.”

I never did make this humiliating confession to him. When some weeks later he asked me for it, I contented myself with saying that Wilmay was apparently a child who could not be spoiled, even by a father with a mess of mad theories.

CHAPTER III

WE sat very late that night talking, and when we separated we mutually agreed that ten o'clock or thereabouts would be the right hour for breakfast. However, I woke at six, went to sleep, and woke again once every ten minutes until shortly after seven, and then rang my bell and got up. When I was dressed I went downstairs and out into the garden. I found Wilmay there, and she came up to look after me. She shook hands, and asked me if I wouldn't like to have breakfast at once.

"No, thanks," I said, "the excellent Carter has just asked me the same question. But I've had some tea, and I'd rather wait until your father comes down. Have you had breakfast?"

"Not yet; I thought I would have breakfast with you two this morning."

I said that would be charming.

She took me off to see the garden and the stables. On the way it occurred to her that it would be pleasant to have breakfast on the lawn.

"We do sometimes, when it's a good morning like this."

I thought the idea capital. She called up an under-gardener, and said with much dignity:

“ Would you kindly go up to the house, and let Carter know that we should like breakfast on the lawn this morning ? ”

It was very quaint—I was amused. While she was showing me her own pony she suddenly asked if I considered that music was as difficult to learn as writing.

I said that it was more difficult, more heart-breaking. I ought really, in self-defence, to have put it much stronger than this. I had guessed what would happen. I had made her want to learn music, and she would learn it, and—this was the horror of it—I was to give her her first lessons. I had always been in the habit of saying that I believed there must be a special reward hereafter for music-masters, because in this life they have to suffer more than other men.

It was at breakfast-time that the moment arrived when I felt that I had either to consider myself a brute or to offer to teach Wilmay the piano. I set my teeth, and made the offer. She thanked me, and said that it would be lovely, but that she must not bother me and take up my time. That, of course, finished it. By the end of breakfast I was imploring as a privilege to be allowed to teach Wilmay the piano, and Wilmay was sweetly and graciously consenting. I told Philip afterwards that I thought in common decency he ought to have protested, and said firmly that he would not allow any guest of his to be turned into a music-master in his house. He smiled and said that he could not see it.

“Very well, then,” I answered, “I will have regular hours for those lessons, and keep to them, and break up your go-as-you-please system.”

At this he only smiled again. Wilmay and I decided upon regular hours, and sometimes we kept to them. I may, perhaps, have forgotten about them three or four times—not more. As I pointed out to Philip, it was better than not even attempting to be regular.

Wilmay was an excellent pupil. She learned very quickly, but then she worked of her own accord far harder than most children would have worked under compulsion. I do not pretend that these lessons were an unmixed joy to me. I doubt if elementary lessons on the piano to a child of ten are ever an unmixed joy to anybody. But I had expected that they would be very much worse. Wilmay really loved music. As a reason for my existence, music seemed to do even better than chocolates, though probably those four boxes helped to solve the problem.

I chaffed Philip occasionally about his system of educating a child by leaving out the education and allowing her to do as she liked. But, speaking seriously, that system had answered admirably with Wilmay. It seemed to have given her a spirit, an independence, a readiness of initiative that one very rarely finds in children of that age. She knew what to do. And, I confess it, she was not spoiled. She seemed to have an innate sweetness, tenderness, and unselfishness of nature

that was proof against spoiling. She gave orders to the servants just as Philip would have done, and the servants were apparently instructed to take her orders as his own, but I never heard her give a dictatorial or unreasonable order, or omit to thank a servant who had done anything for her. Her own woman, Mrs. Blayd, was devoted to her. Mrs. Blayd was a blend of nurse, governess, and lady's maid, and also rather gave one the impression that she was a lady herself. She was a middle-aged woman, very quiet and reserved. Philip told me that she had been with Wilmay ever since her birth.

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During the next three years I saw Philip and Wilmay fairly frequently. Sometimes I went down to Ayshurst. Once or twice my married sister, Mrs. Enterland, had Philip and Wilmay to stay with her at her house in Mayfair. Bertha is a worldly little woman, with few ideals, and those mostly wrong, but before she began to be worldly she had a kind heart, and there are still traces of it left. I had talked to her about Philip and Wilmay, and she was eager to know them. I put it off as long as I could, because Bertha is the very opposite of Philip, and I thought the meeting would be a failure. But Bertha insisted, and the meeting was not a failure. It was a toss-up whether Bertha would decide that Philip was "Colonial" or "very interesting." Philip was a good-looking man, and he dressed well when he was in London, and he saved her

from being swindled over some carriage-horses, and he spent money extravagantly, and he had a history which he did not tell her or anybody else. These things taken together made him in her eyes very interesting. Of course, there never was any doubt at all about Wilmay. She charmed everybody and never knew it.

It was when Wilmay was just fourteen that I had asked her and Philip to come and stop with me at a little cottage that I had on the river. There was no river at Ayshurst, and both of them were fond of boating. On the morning of the day when they should have arrived I received a telegram from Philip :

“Come to Sinden at once. Most urgent.”

CHAPTER IV

I STARTED for Ayshurst, of course, as soon as I received the telegram. Had Philip been an ordinary man, the telegram would have worried me a good deal. As it was, I was by no means sure that he intended me to take it seriously, and that he would not laugh at me on my arrival. Even if he meant me to come, it was quite possible that it was for some perfectly trivial object. In short I knew that it might mean anything or nothing.

I had telegraphed back to say by what train I was coming. The dog-cart was waiting for me at Ayshurst, and one glance at the face of the man who drove it was enough to make me ask him what was wrong at Sinden. He told me that there had been a bad accident, that Philip had been terribly hurt, and that it was very doubtful whether he would still be alive on my arrival. The man drove hard, and there was no time to tell me the details before we were at the door of the house.

The door was opened at once, before I could knock or ring, not by Carter, but by an old gentleman with his cuffs turned back. He was self-possessed, but he spoke quickly.

“ Mr. Derrimer ? ”

“ Yes. You are the doctor ? ”

“ I am Dr. Ingwold. You are just in time. He says that he cannot die until he has seen you.”

COLLECTED TALES

“There is no hope?”

“None. There never has been. I have been here since the early morning, when it happened, but I can only make the pain rather less for him. You had better go in to him at once.”

“Yes.” I went towards the staircase. The doctor touched me on the shoulder.

“Not upstairs,” he said. “He is in the study. It would have been cruelty to carry him any further than was necessary.”

We went down a passage to the study. At the door the doctor said:

“There is a nurse there, but she will come and wait outside with me. He was conscious when I left him.”

Within I heard a faint repeated groan.

I entered the room. A bed had been put there, and the nurse was just turning away from it with a glass in her hand. Little details in the room seemed as if they would be noticed by me even against my will. There was a black morocco hand-bag on the table, bearing the initials R.H.I. in gilt. I found myself puzzled, and then decided that it must belong to the doctor. There was a faint smell of some anæsthetic—I wondered what it was. I noticed a grotesque design in vermillion on an old brown leather screen—was surprised that everything was in order, and that the room was so little changed. All this passed through my mind in a second, as I stepped from the door to the bedside. The nurse came up to me and asked me to go

quite close to the bed so that he need only speak in a whisper. Then she slipped out of the room.

Philip lay on the bed. There was only a sheet over him. His torn and broken body could not bear the weight of heavy bed-clothes. A bandage over his forehead had a fantastic effect like a turban. There was death in his face, and death in his changed voice. He did not move, but his eyes turned to me.

"Thank you for having come, Edward. Everything else is settled. I waited only to see you. I wanted to ask you if you would be Wilmay's guardian?"

"Yes. You should have been sure of that."

"I was, but I wanted to ask it. And you'll do the best you can for her?"

"All that I can."

"That's good of you. She was here a little while ago, but I wouldn't let her stay—scenes like this aren't—we just said good-bye. You take charge of everything. All papers are in the safe in the library, and Mrs. Blayd will give you the keys." There was a long pause, and then he said, "I'm so sorry that I cannot give you my hand."

I could not answer. I put one hand lightly on his shoulder watching his face to be sure that it did not hurt him. He seemed to become drowsy, his eyes closed, and I do not think he knew any longer that I was in the room. His voice was much weaker; he spoke at intervals, but I did not always hear what

he said. Once I caught the words "a long day," and afterwards "and then it becomes much more quiet." Sometimes I heard Wilmay's name. He may have thought that he was speaking to her. Then his lips moved no more, and in the stillness I only heard a watch ticking as if it had gone mad, seeming now to grow louder and now fainter, sometimes to stop for a second and then to hurry on again.

"Philip," I said.

He made no sign that he had heard me. I stepped softly to the door and opened it. The doctor, the nurse, and Mrs. Blayd were waiting outside. The doctor and nurse went into the room now, and I waited with Mrs. Blayd. She was a hard-featured woman, a woman with an immobile face that gave no token of her feelings. I asked her how Wilmay was.

"She is lying down now, sir. She does not speak, and she seems worn out. The rest will do her good, I hope."

"I hope so."

The door opened, and the doctor came out, closing the door behind him. "It is all over," he said. His look of relief was undisguised. "Can you see me in the library in a few minutes, Mr. Derrimer?" he asked.

"Certainly," I said. "I will wait for you there." The doctor went back into the room, and I turned to Mrs. Blayd. "Shall I——" I began.

"I think," she said, "that it would be better if I told Wilmay. And—there are

other little things to be done—some orders—I could see after all that for you.”

I thanked her.

“And would you tell Wilmay that I will come up and see her, if she would like it?”

“Yes, sir, I will tell her. But I do not think she would wish to see anybody at all just now. Shall I press her to——”

“No, no. It must be just as she likes. But you will let her know that I am here.”

I went into the library, thought for a moment, and then wrote a note to my married sister, telling her what had happened, and asking her to come on the morrow. I rang, and had the letter sent off to the post. It was a warm summer day, but I had turned strangely cold. I sat and shivered, waiting for the doctor. It was an hour before he came—it seemed to me to be much longer.

He apologized for having kept me waiting. He had been detained.

“A fool of a housemaid had violent hysterics and another of the maids followed the lead. However, they’re all right now, and professionally there is nothing more for me to do. But I should like to stop here to-night, because I think I can be of assistance to you. I knew Amory well—very well, considering that I knew him only during the last three years. If I can do anything to carry out his wishes now, I am glad to have the opportunity. He asked me to stop with you, and he gave me some directions. Will you have me?”

“It is very kind of you,” I said. “Frankly

I do not even know what has to be done on such occasions. I shall be glad both of your advice and companionship. But will it not be taking up too much of your time ? ”

“ Not at all. My assistant can very well look after my regular practice ; this is quite a small village, and there is not very much to do. I leave most of it to my assistant generally. Then that is settled.”

He rang the bell. “ Carter, I shall be stopping here to-night. Could you send a message across to my house to tell my man to pack my things and bring them here ? ”

And then he turned to me. “ And what have you done so far ? ”

“ Hardly anything. I have written to my married sister, Mrs. Enterland.”

“ Yes. Amory spoke of her to me sometimes.”

“ I think she will come here to-morrow. She is very fond of Wilmay, and I fancy that Wilmay would be quite willing to go away with her.”

“ That, I think, is quite right. Indeed I shall think it quite right if you take her away altogether. She is an impressionable child, and should be away from the scene—from anything that reminds her. But we shall all miss her here.”

“ Do you know how she is ? ”

“ I have just asked Mrs. Blayd. She says that she is not ill, but keeps to her room—will not see any one.”

He mentioned to me some papers in the

library safe, of which Mrs. Blayd has the keys.

"I should, perhaps, look over them to see if there is anything which needs immediate attention."

"Yes, that should be done to-night. Amory often told me that he wished to be cremated, and with as little fuss as possible, but there may be further directions."

A servant brought in a message that Mrs. Blayd would be much obliged if I could speak to her for a minute.

"Very well," I said ; "I will see Mrs. Blayd in the dining-room."

She handed me the keys, hesitated, and then said—

"It was about Wilmay, sir, that I wanted to speak."

"Well ?"

"She is not in the house, and I do not know where she has gone."

CHAPTER V

“ I DON’T understand,” I said. “ Do you know why she has gone ? ”

“ The same thing happened once before, sir, about two years ago. She was very angry with herself for something, and she went away like this. She was away then for eight hours.”

“ Eight hours ? Was she not found and brought back before that ? ”

“ Mr. Amory would not permit any one to go and look for her. He told me she was free to go in and out as she liked, and that she was able to take care of herself. He said, too, that if inquiries were made about her, she would become the subject of a good deal of silly talk in the village and neither he nor Wilmay would like that. She went in the morning, and it was after dinner when she returned. No one but Mr. Amory and myself knew of it, and neither of us said anything to her about it.”

“ Yes, yes, Mrs. Blayd,” I said ; “ but the case is different now. The poor child is half mad with grief. What you have told me makes me very anxious. And it is already getting late. I think a search should be made for her, with all possible discretion, of course, and without creating talk. But still it seems to me that something must be done.”

"Very well, sir," said Mrs. Blayd, but she said it doubtfully.

"Well," I said, "you have known Wilmay from her birth. What do you think yourself—what do you really think?"

"I think that if we found her now it would be of no good. She is not herself. If we let her have her way, she will stop out to-night, but she will come back to-morrow morning. She does not forget those who are fond of her. She would come back if it were only for your sake, sir, or my own, I feel sure of it."

It seemed to me to be rather a difficult position. If I did not go to find Wilmay and bring her back, I was not taking proper care of her; and if I did, I was acting contrary to the wishes of her dead father.

"Wait," I said to Mrs. Blayd. "I shall ask Dr. Ingwold what he thinks would be best."

The doctor was of the same opinion as Mrs. Blayd. "It may do her some slight temporary harm to stop out all night, but—well, I know her, and I think it more likely to do her good." So we settled that, at any rate, until to-morrow morning nothing should be done.

From Dr. Ingwold, later in the same evening, I heard some details of the accident.

"It is the old story," said the doctor. "Your nervous, timid whip, who does not really understand horses, never comes to any harm. He takes no risks. It is the man

who really can drive, who really can do a good deal with a horse, that always try to do just a little more, and have the accidents. In the early morning Philip had driven out with a horse that had already been a good deal of trouble to him. But it was a valuable animal, and he was anxious to finish its education. He took no one with him, and he said to the groom who brought the horse round that he should drive to the station, as he had some inquiries to make there. The groom noticed that, because he knew the horse would not stand sight or sound of a railway train, and knew that Philip was well aware of it too. It was three miles away from the railway station that Philip was afterwards found; there was a steep embankment there at one side of the road, with a white painted wood fence by way of protection. Cart, horse, and man were found at the bottom of this embankment, and the fence, which seems to have been rotten, was all broken down. Philip did not explain exactly how it happened, he said only that he thought it had been mostly his own fault."

Dr. Ingwold was of great assistance to me, and took on himself the trouble of all the horrible business connected with death. As it grew later, and Wilmay did not return, I again became very anxious about her. I was afraid that she might come back and find the house shut up and everybody asleep. I arranged, in consequence, that I would sit up that night in the library. The library windows opened

on to the upper terrace of the garden. I drew the shutters back from these windows, and had the lamp placed near them, so that at whatever hour Wilmay returned she might be able to see that I was still up. The doctor went to bed, but said that he would be down very early in the morning to take my place, and give me a chance of an hour or two's sleep.

I had found in the safe several papers addressed to me. I put them on the table by the lamp, drew up my chair, lit my pipe, and began to open and read them. There was a terrible quiet in the house, almost as if the inanimate house knew that a dead man was lying there. So much did this idea impress me that the rustling of the papers, or the noise made by the shifting of my chair, seemed to be like a profanity. One gets into a nervous imaginative state when one is emotionally worn out and then sits up late at night.

All the time that I was reading I was also listening intently. If the branches outside moved in the light wind, the sound seemed changed to Wilmay's voice, and I looked up from the papers. At any moment I was ready to hear her step on the gravel outside, to open the window and call to her. But she never came. The long hours wore on, tediously long, until the dawn came, and outside in the garden the whispered chirpings of the birds broke into full song in the sunlight.

Amongst the papers there was a copy of his

will, the will itself being in the charge of his solicitors. I knew that he had arranged for his solicitors to act as his executors, because we had often referred to this. "I may," he used to say, "have bored people during my lifetime. I will go further, and say that when I have got on to any of my hobbies, such as precious stones, or emendations in the 'Agamemnon,' or horse-breaking"—and this by no means exhausted the list of his special subjects—"I must have bored people. In fact, I've seen them get restless, and smile, and try to look intelligent, and have known that I was boring them and yet been unable to stop it. But I don't mean to go on boring posthumously. I don't mean to ask a man of leisure to do badly for nothing what a man of business can be paid to do well." I did not even glance over the will that night. I am not precisely a sentimentalist, but I was in no hurry to find out what money the dead man had, or what he had done with it.

There was a long letter, addressed to me, and dated only a couple of months before. It began by referring to the uncertainty of life, "even for a man living as quietly, carefully, and unexcitedly as myself." It went on with his request that I would be Wilmay's guardian, and here, when I would have welcomed the most minute and elaborate directions, he gave none, or next to none. There were only a few suggestions. One, which had already occurred to me, was that Wilmay

should go to live with my sister Mrs. Enterland. He also suggested that, though it might become necessary now to put restrictions on her in some ways, she should still be allowed to work out her own education just as she liked. In concluding, he gave me a little—a very little—information. His wife's maiden name had been Wilmay Forland; she had died very soon after her daughter's birth. "She was the best woman in the world," he wrote, simply, "and, I think, one of the most beautiful. I had no opportunity to get her portrait painted, and we both disliked photographs. That has not mattered, for I have always remembered her, and, as the younger Wilmay grows up, I think you will be able to see what her mother was like." He went on to say that after his death he believed that Wilmay would have no other relation living, though there might possibly be one—her mother's brother. "This man's name was Charles Forland. Before I arrived on the scene I am afraid he was in far from comfortable circumstances. He had already spent his own small capital and the greater part of his sister's. He was still getting money from her, from time to time, in order that he might in future, as he phrased it, 'adopt a quite different course.' But these sums were of necessity small, and apparently, after paying for his bare livelihood and the few little luxuries that he felt he could fancy, they left no margin for the adoption of the quite different course. In addition to this,

his sister had entirely ceased to believe in him or respect him. His conduct was not, it is true, of a kind to make one think that he respected himself, but it was always quite obvious that he liked others to respect him, and would do anything to secure that respect except deserve it. When I appeared on the scene, I was fortunately able to change his circumstances. I wrote him cheques. As I became richer, I wrote him larger cheques. I cannot claim that I have ever been able to write him cheques so large as to make him feel justified in the adoption of the quite different course. But I have enabled him to live in comparative affluence without working for it. The only thing that he was required to do for it was to abstain from seeing my wife or daughter, and to see me only on pay-day, when he called for his cheque. I do not say that I respected him or believed in him, as he would have liked. But I paid him to keep away, which he seemed to like still better. The last time I saw him was at Sinden, rather more than three years ago. He had called to suggest that he had been put to great personal inconvenience and expense by my move to England, and that the price of his passage both ways should be added to the customary amount of his cheque. It struck me at the time that he gave every promise that he would die of drink in the course of the year. But I did not like to be too sanguine about it; Charles Forland

WILMAY

rarely stuck to any one thing for long. Since then I have not seen him, and I am quite sure he is dead. If he had been alive, he would have been to me for money, and the absence of any demands from him is equivalent to his certificate of death. It was, I confess, always amazing to me that he and Wilmay were brother and sister, children of the same parents. But such things happen. He has never seen my daughter Wilmay since she was a baby, by the way, and Wilmay neither recollects him nor knows of his existence. She had better not be told about him. Should he turn up again—but he will not. As I say, I have the equivalent of his death certificate. But do not let me imply that Charles Forland had no good points. He blackmailed me for having married his sister, and he would do no kind of work, and later in life he seems to have become excessively intemperate. But he was a handsome man, a good talker, and occasionally a wit—a man by no means without charm.”

I read the whole of that letter with great interest twice over. I glanced through some of the other papers. At five o'clock I heard footsteps overhead, and then Dr. Ingwold came down and entered the library to take my place, sending me up to bed at once.

CHAPTER VI

I HAD not expected to sleep, but I fell asleep at once. I suppose I was about tired out. For rather over two hours I slept soundly, and then woke suddenly, with a start, with the idea that I had just heard Wilmay call me loudly by my name. It was, of course, a delusion—I had been dreaming. But though I recognized that, I was unable to go to sleep again, and rose.

I joined the doctor at breakfast. Wilmay had not returned. For the first time the doctor looked a little hesitating, a little less as if he knew exactly the right thing to do, and was perfectly able to do it. We sent for Mrs. Blayd, and had a long talk with her. She told us of two or three places near, where Wilmay had always been fond of going, and where she might possibly be found now. I decided that we would try those places first, and that then if we did not find her, there was no help for it, and a regular search would have to be instituted with all the assistance that we could get. To this Mrs. Blayd quite agreed; like the doctor, she was beginning to get nervous. The poor woman had, it appeared, herself been up most of the night, and looked worn and ill.

The morning was glorious—a cool wind, a brilliant sun, and the country as beautiful

as if no one had ever died or been unhappy. The doctor and I decided to go first to a plantation standing on the ridge of a low hill about a mile away from Sinden. He went up the plantation on one side of this ridge, and I on the other. We were out of sight of each other, but within call. One's footsteps were absolutely noiseless on the soft white sand of the narrow winding path. At the first turn in this path my search was over. Wilmay was coming down the path towards me. She carried a great bunch of wild roses tied together with the riband that she had taken from her hair. The dust had powdered thick on her little tan shoes ; her pretty hands had been a little torn and scratched by the brambles. Her face was white, and her lips almost colourless. She smiled when she saw me, and called me by my name.

"Wilmay," I said, "poor little Wilmay ! I am glad I have found you."

"I was coming back," she said.

"You very nearly frightened us."

"Yes, I have been thinking about that. I would not have been away so long only I wanted to get quite quiet again. That is why I came here, where there isn't anybody. I will be good now."

"It's all right, dear ; I didn't mean to find fault with you. It's all right now that we have got you back again. Aren't you very tired ?"

"Not very. I slept for a little time, until the sun on my eyes woke me. Then I got these." She held out the roses.

"They are lovely," I said.

She put them in my hand. "I want you to give them to my father with my dearest love. I shall not see him any more, not any more now." Her voice was wistful and sad, but quite steady. I think she had made up her mind not to cry any more—that she thought it might distress us to see her crying.

We walked a few steps further, and I was just going to tell her that I had the doctor with me, when she said :

"I've suddenly got tired, Edward. Will you—help me a little ? "

I caught her in my arms as she fainted, and put her down on the grass by the path. In a minute I had the doctor by her side. He had come prepared for this emergency, and he soon revived her. When her eyes opened again, she seemed surprised to see him.

"I thought it was Edward," she said.

"It was—I am here too."

"I'm so sorry—but I can walk again now."

We would not let her walk, and I carried her the rest of the way.

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Before mid-day Bertha arrived, and I was never more glad to see her. She had given up a host of social engagements, and was prepared to give up any number more for Wilmay's sake. It was the greatest sacrifice that could have been demanded of her, and she made it most willingly. She heard from me, and heard with composure, of Philip's

death, but she could not bear to hear how Wilmay had gone away to the plantation "where there isn't anybody," and how I had found her. She stopped me, and said that a crying woman would be of no good in the house, and she would hear the rest some other time. She spent most of her time that day with Wilmay, and two days afterwards gave up the rest of the London season and took Wilmay away to the sea. Wilmay was quite willing to go; she had grown very fond of Bertha.

They spent the whole of that winter abroad together, and I was with them some part of the time. Youth is recuperative; one blow may take its strength and spirit and gladness for a time, but youth will have them all back. Wilmay became the old Wilmay again, saw life with her blue eyes as bright as before, rode her pony, learned to swim and to fence, and chattered the prettiest French without ever learning it at all.

"She is at the awkward age," said Bertha some time afterwards to me, "but with the awkwardness left out. In a few years' time I shall have to begin to think——" Bertha paused. "A beauty, four thousand a year, and the sweetest nature in the world. She ought to do very well."

"There's a splendid auctioneer lost in you," I said.

Bertha said that was merely rude.

"Well," I said, "at any rate wait until the time comes."

“Of course I never breathe a word to her about it—my lord the guardian.”

“I should think not. And when the time comes, remember that Wilmay has not an atom of worldliness in her nature.”

“Nor have I,” retorted Bertha, “only a little common sense.”

“You can call it what you like, but I won’t have her—when the time does come—forced into anything, however brilliant.”

“You don’t understand these things,” said my sister, with a sigh of resignation; “but as the child’s not yet sixteen, you needn’t begin to trouble your guardianish mind just yet.”

On Wilmay’s sixteenth birthday, she, Bertha, and myself dined together at Bertha’s house. There was no one else there. We had dined together in that way many a time before, but this evening—this evening for the first time—it was different.

CHAPTER VII

"MRS. ENTERLAND desired me to say, sir, that she would be down directly," said Carter, as he opened the drawing-room door.

Carter and Mrs. Blayd had both been taken into my sister's service—Carter, of course, as butler, and Mrs. Blayd as maid to Wilmay, and housekeeper, occasional secretary, and several other things to my sister. She had no fixed position, and my sister said that she was a treasure.

I waited a few minutes in the drawing-room. It was the usual fashionable mixture of things ancient and modern, and just as much too full and too feminine as every other drawing-room at that period in the district. Then Bertha entered looking mysterious and pleased, which she was, and much younger than thirty-five, which she was not. She shook me warmly by the hand, kissed me, and exclaimed, "Edward, we've got a surprise for you."

"Yes?" I said. "Then, of course, you needn't trouble to apologize."

"Why, I've hardly kept you waiting a second. The fact is that it didn't come until the last moment—oh, I've nearly let the secret out."

"Let it quite out. You won't be happy until you've done it. Besides, I hate surprises. They're all alike—something goes pop

and hurts you, and then everybody else laughs. I think they're shockingly vulgar myself."

"But this surprise isn't at all like that. It's beautiful."

"Well, how's Wilmay? And where's Wilmay?"

"Wilmay's very well indeed, and quite charmed with your present, and you won't see her just yet—that's part of the secret."

"You've hidden her behind a curtain or a screen or somewhere. And she'll jump out and scream, and the ghastly part of it is that you'll both of you think it funny. When is it going to happen?"

Carter announced that dinner was served.

"It's not going to happen at all, and Wilmay's much too old to care about such stupid childish games. Take me into the dining-room, and you shall behold her."

In the dining-room Wilmay was standing at one end of the table. She was a transformed Wilmay. Hitherto she had worn her hair down; now her hair was up and done in the latest and correctest fashion. Hitherto, on the occasions when she had dined downstairs with Bertha and myself, she had worn something which I called a "kid's compromise," but I believe is known as a demi-toilette. Now she was in a regular dinner-dress, white, low, and long. Round her neck was the string of pearls that I had given her. She looked very shy and rather pleased; she smiled and blushed. I made a low obeisance, kissed her hand, and

begged to be allowed the honour of congratulating Miss Amory on her birthday.

Wilmay was protesting, and thanking me for the pearls as we sat down to dinner. Wilmay, as my sister had arranged, took the place of the hostess, and Bertha and myself sat on either side of her.

"Well?" said Bertha, "and what might my lord the guardian happen to be thinking of us?"

"At the first shock—I mean, at the first enchantment—I can think only of myself. Wilmay, tell the truth. How old are you?"

"I'm sixteen, please, Edward. No, that's not right, I'm in my seventeenth year."

"And I'm really in my thirty-ninth year, and I'm considered to be young for my age; have always felt young until now. Now I feel that I am one hundred and four. I see the babe for which I bought chocolates——"

"But, Edward," interrupted Wilmay, "I was not a babe; I was ten years old."

"A very young ten, and wore on the occasion when I first met you a somewhat unconventional costume."

Wilmay laughed and blushed. It was as though some one had given her the power of blushing for a birthday present. She had never been in the least self-conscious before.

"And now," I said, "what a change is here!"

"Not really changed," Wilmay pleaded. "My hair's done differently, and I've got a

new dress, but I'm still just the same—the same, but in disguise.”

But she was not just the same—and she was never just the same again. The twilight of childhood was passing, and the dawn was coming—the dawn, and the day, and the night.

The dinner was amusing enough. Bertha was always, more or less, a bright woman. Wilmay laughed more quietly, it seemed to me, than usual, and talked less. Some of the things she said were serious to the verge of sentimentality, and, of course, we laughed at her for them mercilessly. She had been reading stories and seeing plays, and she said that it seemed as if life were very sad, but that the sadness was in some ways rather nice. And then she was compelled to laugh at herself.

Bertha said that I was not to be long over my cigarette, because I was going to play to them.

“No, I think not,” I said. “Your piano’s never in tune; and you cover it with a sort of brocade tablecloth, pot palms, photographs, majolica, and mess generally, because you think it looks pretty.”

“Speak to him, Wilmay!” said Bertha. “Explain to him!”

“The piano’s perfectly all right, Edward,” said Wilmay, laughing, “and you may have the things taken off it, if you like. But while you’re in my house you’re expected—to—to behave as such.”

“I accept the rebuke in the spirit in which

it is offered, and in five minutes I will do myself the honour to wait upon her—as my tailor says.”

But when I got into the drawing-room, somehow or other we all three began to talk, and we went on talking until I rose to go. I had promised to meet some men at the club. Then Wilmay said that I must stop a little longer, and play, because it was her birthday. So I stopped and played them Chopin waltzes and nocturnes, and they went through the usual raptures. It was late rather when at last I stood in the hall putting on my coat. Wilmay followed me from the drawing-room into the hall.

“Has Mr. Derrimer’s cab got a lamp inside it?” she asked Carter. Carter believed so. “Then,” she said, giving me a little note, “you may have this to read as you go home. Good night, again.”

The note ran as follows :

“DEAR EDWARD,—I am writing this in my bedroom before dinner. I know I shan’t be able to thank you half enough for those lovely pearls, and I want to thank you again and again. You are always so kind to me.—Ever your loving

“WILMAY.”

I put the note in my pocket. For a few minutes I mused absent-mindedly, and then I noticed that the cab had nearly reached the club. I made the man turn round and drive me home instead.

CHAPTER VIII

BERTHA did not bring Wilmay out, definitely and formally, until she was seventeen. During the year before I had got into the habit of going rather often to Bertha's house. Bertha loved good music for ten minutes. It was essential that the music should be good and that it should not last longer than ten minutes. So she used to send me with Wilmay to St. James's Hall, while she enjoyed at home what she called "the rare luxury of not hearing a concert." Sometimes I rode in the Park with Wilmay. In one way and another I saw a good deal of her.

Bertha was widening the scope of her ambition for Wilmay.

"You may not know it," she said to me, "but Wilmay is probably at this moment the most beautiful girl in the world."

"I don't know all the others," I said. "But Wilmay looks all right."

"Looks all right! I've been through ten London seasons without seeing anything like her."

"Ten London seasons, or even more—we're getting very old, Bertha, very, very old."

"You can be old, if you like," replied Bertha. "Age is no crime in a man. But I'm not old, and I won't be. Ah," she sighed, "if I could only be Wilmay for one season!"

W I L M A Y

I wonder if she knows what a perfectly heavenly time she is going to have."

Bertha had some grounds for her extravagant praise. Wilmay's beauty was unusual and remarkable. In the street, as she went unconsciously past, people turned to look at her. In the theatre or at concerts, though she dressed quietly and her own attention was always wholly given to the play or the music, she made something like a sensation. That eccentric but charming old lady, Lady Harston, met Wilmay by chance at Bertha's house, and was much impressed. When she left she shook Wilmay warmly by the hand, and said, "Good-bye, my dear, and thank you."

"But why do you thank me?" Wilmay asked.

"Because I have seen the face of an angel."

Wilmay asked me afterwards what she had meant. I told her that I did not know, and that Lady Harston was more or less mad. But I might just as well have told her the truth, for it was impossible to spoil her. I think she knew that she was very beautiful, and I suppose she was glad of it. But compliments on her beauty, however delicate and indirect, bored her when they came from women and frightened or displeased her when they came from men.

Bertha gave a dance soon after Wilmay came out. Certainly, that night Wilmay hardly looked like a flesh-and-blood mortal,

COLLECTED TALES

an ordinary thing that danced and could be taken down to supper. Her beauty was not of this world. It was not only that her features were perfect in shape, and that the colouring of her eyes and hair and skin was so lovely ; she had a rare sweetness of expression, an expression that is only found with an absolutely unselfish and noble nature. I saw Stenling, the portrait-painter, looking at her with undisguised and reverent admiration. Later in the evening Bertha touched me on the arm.

“Isn’t she splendid ?” she said.

“Who ?”

“Wilmary, of course,” Bertha went on, speaking rapidly in a low voice. “Everybody’s talking of her. Stenling’s in a great state of excitement. He goes about saying, ‘Either I paint Miss Amory or I die.’ But I mustn’t wait here”—and before I could reply she passed on.

Wilmary gave me two dances. I danced the first with her, and we sat out the second.

“It’s good of you, Wilmary,” I said, “to take pity on the aged and infirm like this.”

“Do you know, Edward,” she said, “that you’ve always been the same age ever since I’ve known you. You’ve not changed in the least. You’ll never be old.”

“It’s my fixed intention to be forty next year.”

“But you’ve not changed, and I have. And women get old so quickly—it’s very sad. Yes, of course I am young enough now.

But"—she stretched out her hands—"I feel the nasty little slippery moments running through my fingers and laughing, and I can't hold them."

"Wilmay," I said, "this will not do at all. Your time is now. The night is yours—a night of triumph. You must be very happy."

She smiled. "I am not really very miserable. But I'm not very happy either."

"Why not?"

"I'm—I don't know—restless. Did you ever want something and yet not know what it was?"

I reflected, and said that I knew what she meant.

There was a moment's pause, and then she said:

"You must not tell Bertha that I am not quite absolutely happy, because she would not understand as you do, and it would distress her. I should not like that; I'd do anything for Bertha, you know, and anything wouldn't be half enough."

Yes, that was precisely what I was afraid of—that Wilmay would do anything for Bertha, even to the imperilling of her own happiness.

"Besides," Wilmay went on, "it is really nothing—a fit of sentimentality. Why don't you laugh at me, Edward?"

"To-night," I said, "you are too beautiful to be laughed at?"

She looked at me with wide-open, troubled eyes.

COLLECTED TALES

“Or else,” I said, “perhaps I’ve grown too sentimental myself to do any laughing.”

I left the dance early, and went home. But it was long after that before I went to bed. I had to make up my mind one way or the other, and I found it difficult. The decision came at last, and it only remained for me to act upon it, and as far as possible to avoid the weakness of pitying myself. When my man called me in the morning, he was a little surprised to be told that we should leave for Paris that night.

In the afternoon I went round to Bertha’s house. Wilmay was out. Lady Harston was taking her to some picture-gallery. “Which,” as Bertha remarked, “is all very well when you’re very young. But, personally, I don’t go to picture-galleries the afternoon after a dance.”

Bertha looked at me up and down. “What’s the matter with you? What have you been doing with yourself?”

“Nothing. Never been fitter.”

“Well, you don’t look it. Go home, and then go to bed.”

“No,” I said, “I shall go home, and then go to Paris.”

Bertha got up, walked to the window, and looked out.

“Going to be away long?”

“Oh, some little time, I believe.”

Bertha sighed. “You won’t think me unsisterly, but I’m not altogether sorry to hear it.”

WILMAY

“Unsisterly? Why, only a near blood relation could have said that. And why are you glad?”

“I think you know.”

“And I’m positive I don’t.”

She crossed the room, and sat down again.

“It’s not on my account, of course,” she said. “I shall miss you very much. You’ve been most useful and obliging whenever I’ve given a dinner or anything, and I’m not ungrateful. I like nothing better than to have you here. I’m sure Wilmay will miss you too. But—well——”

“Ah! We come to it at last.”

“Well, don’t you think that you’ve been too much with Wilmay of late? You go everywhere with her. It might look—can’t you see for yourself?”

“It might look as if I were her guardian. I am.”

“And it may look something quite different. It may make people think that you yourself are engaged to her, or about to be engaged to her—prevent a suitable man from coming forward—do Wilmay a lot of harm, while it can do you no good. Where is the sense of it? Wilmay is fond of you very much as a child is fond of her father. What your feelings towards her are, I don’t pretend to know. But if you carry on anything approaching a flirtation with her, you behave very meanly and badly, and of course you cannot possibly marry her.”

COLLECTED TALES

"You put ideas into one's head. Let me think it over. By what law of this land or any other land am I forbidden to marry Wilmay, if we both decide on that?"

"You are forbidden by your own feelings."

"I have none."

"Please be serious. You are twenty-two years older than Wilmay—much too old. You are also much too poor; you have about a quarter of the money that Wilmay has. With her wonderful beauty she ought to make a brilliant marriage. Youth, wealth, high rank—she ought to have all of them, and you know it, and you have none of them. Besides, what would the world say? That you had taken advantage of your position as her guardian to serve your own interests rather than hers. And the world would be right."

"And yet you have told me to marry money."

"No; I did mention a lady—two ladies—who might have made you happy, would certainly have accepted you, and happened to have money. That is a very different thing. Ah, if you could only have taken my advice then!"

"I couldn't have married both, unless I'd arranged for the sentences to run consecutively—that's the right phrase, I believe—and I didn't care to make invidious distinctions. And now, my dear Bertha, you can curb your feverish imagination. I am not going to marry Wilmay. I am going to

Paris to-night, which, as you will see in your calmer moments, is not the same thing."

"Can you take nothing seriously? Of course, I did not seriously suppose that you wanted to marry Wilmay, but her future's a very grave question, and I don't see why I should be laughed at because I am so anxious to do the best I possibly can for her."

"Well then, I *will* speak seriously. You have your own idea of a brilliant marriage, and I do not think your idea is Wilmay's, and I'm absolutely certain that it's not mine. Remind yourself that there are such things as unhappy duchesses."

"My dear Edward, I'm not a snob. I only say that one can't give up common sense altogether."

"At any rate, I am not going to have Wilmay forced into any marriage. She must be left free. For goodness' sake don't make plots and schemes for her."

"You're really rather crude, Edward. One does not force people nowadays. I might, perhaps, advise, if I felt quite sure I was right. There could be no harm in that."

"True, you've advised me to marry your own selections, and there's been no harm in it. Because, you see, I have not married them. But with Wilmay it is different. She knows nothing of men or of marriage; she is as innocent as a baby, and she is devoted to you. She might let herself be persuaded—in fact, I should think your advice would be much more dangerous than if you point-blank commanded

her to marry the nearest duke. However, when the time comes I shall have something to say, you will remember. And in the meantime I'm not here to quarrel with you, but to say good-bye."

"I never quarrel," said Bertha, with her most charming smile. "Good-bye, Edward. Come to London occasionally, you know. You ought to do that, just to see that I'm not standing over Wilmay with a horse-whip and making her marry the wrong people. I will say good-bye to her for you, and explain, when she comes back."

CHAPTER IX

FOR nearly two years after this I never saw Wilmay. Of course I did not spend the whole of this time at Paris. I did occasionally come to London, and it was more by chance than from intention that I did not meet Wilmay there. For some few months I travelled in Italy. During this period I composed an opera, and it was produced, and had a certain measure of success—that is to say, it was not nearly as good as I had meant it to be, but it benefited me financially. It was the first money of importance that I had ever earned, and I endeavoured to feel that it degraded me, but could not manage it. However, I am quite conscious that I am the fool of this story and not the hero, and that it is better to write of other people.

Let me first of all do justice to Bertha. A very great person indeed, who was sixty-five years old, but looked more, was good enough to approve of Wilmay. He even decided to share his greatness with her, and—with the mad impetuosity so common at that age—sent his sister to talk it over with Bertha. Bertha expressed herself as being much complimented, but was afraid that she was unable to give the great person any encouragement. The great person thought it over, and the mature wisdom of his sixty-five years spared him the

trouble of being refused by Wilmay. Bertha felt that she had done well, and sighed. Wilmay laughed. Bertha occasionally sent me a selection, and told me that she had found the very man for Wilmay. At first this used to make me rather nervous. But I soon discovered that Wilmay never allowed any of these very men to get as far as a proposal. I grew more easy in my mind; it seemed as if Bertha would be compelled to let Wilmay choose her own husband.

Only twice did Wilmay in person actually receive a proposal. The first proposal was from a young novelist, a man of good family, but no means. He seems to have been really very much in love with Wilmay. He compelled her to hear him, even though he told her at the time that he knew there was no hope for him. Wilmay refused him definitely and finally, but she did not laugh this time. On the contrary, as she told me in her letter about it, she cried. "He turned white, and fidgeted with his hands, and began sentences which he couldn't finish. And then he was so humble, and didn't seem to think anything about himself, and his eyes were so sad. I couldn't help crying, and I do hope I'll never have anything of that kind happen to me again." Bertha was exceedingly angry with this young man. After his refusal, he went very much to the bad, which without doubt was quite romantic of him, though it would probably have paid him better to have written a novel.

The second proposal was from a young baronet, Sir Vincent Carrone, and this proposal Wilmay accepted. As I have done justice to Bertha let me also do justice to Sir Vincent. He was a man of twenty-eight, good-looking, and sufficiently wealthy. He was honestly in love with Wilmay, and in most respects he was a fine fellow. He was not clever, but neither was he appallingly stupid. He was a straight man, with a good reputation and a liking for country life and sport. Before the proposal took place I had a letter from Bertha about him. He had said nothing to her, but he was paying very marked attention to Wilmay, and Bertha felt sure that he would ask Wilmay to marry him. I replied that if Wilmay was really fond of the man, and accepted him, nothing could be more satisfactory, but that in the meantime Bertha had better not interfere. How far she did interfere, if at all, I have never learned since nor wished to learn.

Bertha announced to me the engagement in a letter of six rhapsodic pages. She was quite certain that Wilmay would be very happy. Sir Vincent was so good, and so kind, and—but there was no end to her praise of him. I am quite sure that at this time, as at all other times, Bertha only desired Wilmay's happiness. If she influenced Wilmay at all it was only with the view of securing that happiness. She concluded by saying that Wilmay would also write to me, but that she was very shy in speaking or writing of the engagement.

The letter from Wilmay was much shorter, and I did not quite like it. There was an almost pathetic reiteration that she hoped, or she believed, that she was going to be happy. But there was no statement that she actually was happy then. She, too, praised Vincent, but almost in the same terms that Bertha used, as if she were repeating a lesson. She did not describe, and, of course, I had not expected her to describe, the circumstances of the proposal; but I was surprised that the greater part of the letter was about Bertha, and not about herself or her lover. I was not quite satisfied, and yet I seemed to have no definite ground for interference. I did my best to eliminate any personal feelings of my own, and look at the thing fairly, and I found nothing to support my objection but some infinitesimal things that Bertha would have laughed at. Indeed, Bertha herself had partly explained the tone of Wilmay's letter.

A week later the engagement was publicly announced; the marriage was to take place six months afterwards. Wilmay had written to me frequently since I had left England, often upbraiding me for stopping away so long, asking me why I did it, and telling me to come back. Now, in three months, I had only two short notes from her. They were written far less freely and familiarly than her old letters, and though there was an assumption of lightheartedness all through them, they did not give me the impression that she was happy. As the six months drew to an

end, I heard very little of Wilmay. The trousseau was being purchased, preparations were being made for the marriage, wedding presents were pouring in; Wilmay had no time to write, and Bertha only sent short scrappy notes written in the greatest haste. It was about three weeks before the wedding that I returned to England to complete some necessary business arrangements.

I arrived in London in the morning. I had not told Bertha what day I should come, but in the afternoon I started out to call on her. It was a bright, sunny afternoon, and I found the walk through the park pleasant after the hour that I had just spent in a dry solicitor's dusty office. As I walked along Bertha's victoria met me. Bertha and Wilmay were both in it, and neither of them saw me, Wilmay was laughing. That laugh consoled me. Everything was all right then, and I had been worrying myself for nothing.

As Bertha and Wilmay were both out, it was obviously of no good to go on to Bertha's house. To sit in her mistaken drawing-room and wait for her would have been merely tiresome. So I went back home, meaning to call on Bertha again later in the afternoon. My flat is on the first floor, and as I walked up the steps to it I passed a handsome middle-aged gentleman, who was peering about him uncertainly. He caught me up again on the landing, just as I drew my latchkey from my pocket, stared at me hard, and then raised his hat.

"I think," he said, "I must be speaking to Mr. Derrimer—Mr. Edward Derrimer."

"Yes," I said, "that is my name."

He was carefully dressed and rather gave me the idea that all his clothes were absolutely new. His hair was dark brown, and beginning to grow grey; he wore a short waxed moustache, and touched the ends of it nervously from time to time. His deep-set blue eyes watched me narrowly. He began to pull a card-case from his pocket, and then said :

"But I think you must know me, Mr. Derrimer."

"It's unpardonable, but my memory——"

"Perhaps I should have said that you must have heard of me. Wilmay would not recall me, but Philip Amory, who was very, very kind to me—though in some respects he sadly misunderstood me—must have mentioned my name."

In a second the scene flashed back on my memory. I saw myself sitting in the library at Sindon, with the table drawn up near to the window, and the lighted lamp on it, reading that letter of Philip's to me. The phrase "adopt a quite different course" came back to me.

I held out my hand. "You are Wilmay's uncle."

He bowed and smiled. "I am. I have been particularly anxious to see you. I thought it best to see you first."

"Won't you come in?" I said. And we passed together into the room I used as my study.

CHAPTER X

"I AM afraid," said Charles Forland nervously, "that you must find my presence a little embarrassing."

"Not at all," I lied civilly.

"I should like to assure you that I have no feelings of resentment against you whatever. It is not your fault that my poor brother-in-law gave you a position—the position of Wilmay's guardian—which should have been mine. With all his kindness to me he misunderstood me, and I gather from his solicitors, whom I have just left, that at the last he did not even mention my name in his will."

"I happen to know that he believed you to be dead."

"Yes, I dare say it was my fault." He spoke with more confidence now. His manner was by no means bad. He was not quite the suave hypocrite that I had expected; indeed, he showed one or two touches of cynicism that rather amused me. "However, I, his brother-in-law, received nothing; you, a stranger, benefited considerably."

"Did the solicitors tell you that?"

"Do solicitors ever tell you anything that you want to know? A man, however, does not make you the guardian of his child and——"

"There is no mystery about it. If you

want to know, Philip left me his library and his cellar. I'm sorry it should annoy you."

"But, Mr. Derrimer, it does not annoy me. I have been trying to explain that, though under the circumstances I might feel resentment, I feel none. In fact, it is to you, as Wilmay's guardian, that I come first. I might have gone to Wilmay or Sir Vincent—of course I have read in the papers of the impending marriage—but I went to Philip's solicitors, and, learning from them that you were Wilmay's guardian, decided to apply to you first."

"What have you been doing all the time that you were away?"

"I cannot tell you all the details. Shortly after I last saw Philip—it was an occasion on which he had very much exasperated me—I left England for America. I had resolved not to permit Philip to advance any more money for the purposes of speculative business of my own, which hitherto had been unremunerative, but still contained great promises. I resolved to adopt a quite different course. I said to myself that I would now make a fortune for myself and for no one else, and leave Philip out of it. As I say, at the time I was exasperated against Philip."

As I have said, the man was not exactly a hypocrite; he was a swindler who began by deceiving himself.

"Did you ever eat a Compactum Dinner?" he asked.

“No. I don’t understand.”

“It was a novelty in canned goods. A tin with four compartments—soup in the first, fish in the second, roast meat in the third, and vegetables in the last. A Compactum Dinner, sufficient for one person, could at one time have been purchased in London for a shilling.”

“No doubt,” I said, “it was very good, but what’s it got to do with it?”

“Good? It was bad. I may say that it was damned bad. And I ought to know, for I invented it, manufactured it, exported it, made a fortune over it, went bankrupt over it, and was finally brought so low that I once tried to eat it. And in that sentence I’ve given you the history of three years. My next bankruptcy was three years later, and very unexpected. My third——”

“Never mind,” I said drearily, “going into all the bankruptcies.”

“I merely wanted to show you that I did work and struggle, whatever Philip said of my idleness. Philip also said that I should die of drink, and in a moment of irritation expressed the hope that I would do it soon. I must show you that his version of my character was not the right one. I have my self-respect.”

“All right,” I said, “I see that you don’t drink now, Mr. Forland. But had we not better come to business? Why have you applied to me?”

“Because I thought it possible that you

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might not wish me to apply to Wilmay or Sir Vincent."

"Shall I speak quite plainly?"

"Certainly."

"I should prefer that you never saw either, and never communicated with either in any way."

"Yes," he said, "you have spoken plainly, and I will speak as plainly. I have no recollection of Wilmay, and I have never seen Sir Vincent Carrone. As far as my affection for them is concerned, it does not matter one straw to me if I never see either, and they are left in ignorance of my existence. It is on a point of principle that I should see them. I feel myself a debtor to them; it is my duty, and I feel it to be my duty, to repay them every penny of the money that my sister and Philip advanced to me. I have kept a note of the exact sum, six thousand five hundred pounds, and I wish to repay it."

For the moment I was very much surprised, but it was only for a moment.

"I need not say that I have not the money," he went on. "But they can very well afford to advance me the thousand that will enable me to get that and much more. I am her mother's brother, and her father was exceedingly kind to me until an unfortunate misunderstanding. I have a claim."

"Look here," I said, "you have told me you once made a fortune. Why didn't you repay then?"

"I was on the point of doing so. But I

was extending my business at the time. Extend a business too far, and it breaks—er—like—elastic. Mine broke.”

I walked up and down the room. For Wilmay’s sake I had to get this man out of England. I would speak to Sir Vincent about him, because I knew he would take a common-sense view of the case, and because it seemed unfair not to tell him. But I wanted to keep Forland away from Wilmay, and not to let the relationship become publicly known.

“Where would you go, if you had money?” I asked.

“Coolgardie,” he replied, without the least hesitation.

“Well,” I said, “I’m glad you came to me. Wilmay has no power at present to give you the money. Sir Vincent wouldn’t give you it. I can, and I will. I’m going to write a cheque for two hundred, and I will pay the balance of eight hundred pounds to you in instalments of one hundred every three months. Should you, during that period, at any time return to England, or communicate in any way with Wilmay or Sir Vincent Carrone, the remainder due to you will be stopped.”

He said that he was reluctant to take money from me, as he felt that on me personally he had no claim whatever. He hoped that I would regard it as an investment—simply as an investment. In short, he accepted the arrangement, and pocketed the cheque.

“And now,” he said, “you must dine with me.”

For the fun of the thing, I did dine with him, and I have never been better entertained. He told stories about himself, and I have no doubt that he lied, but he lied most amusingly. He kept a glass of wine by his side at dinner, but he never touched it, and drank only water.

A few days afterwards I had the pleasure of seeing him off.

"Pardon me," he said at the last moment, "but I know you better now, and I want to ask you something. You have heard Philip speak of me, apparently—you have now had an opportunity of judging for yourself. Do you think I am a damned blackguard?"

I replied that we were all the creatures of circumstances. He sighed, and seemed dissatisfied.

To Sir Vincent I merely said that Wilmay, though she did not know it, had an uncle who was a bad lot.

"So've I," he answered. "Everybody's got a bad egg of a relation somewhere."

"Well," I said, "this particular egg is on its way to Coolgardie at present. Its favourite pastimes are borrowing money and occasionally entering on some weird business and going bankrupt. If it should ever apply to you, I want you to do nothing until you have consulted me."

"Very well, as you like. But, I say, couldn't one do anything for the poor beggar?"

"Very good of you, but it's really not necessary. At present he's provided for. I

WILMAY

mentioned it because it was the particular wish of her father that Wilmay should never see this man or know of his existence. She is sensitive—it would humiliate and distress her. I thought a word to you——”

“Of course. Much obliged to you. The world’s too bad for Wilmay anyhow, and the less she knows of the badness the better.”

CHAPTER XI

IT was about a week before this conversation took place that I saw Wilmay for the first time (with the exception of that momentary glimpse in the Park) since my return to England. It was at Bertha's house in the morning. I had sent word that I was coming, and I found them both in the morning-room. Bertha looked very young and quite pretty, and greeted me with much sisterly effusiveness. Wilmay took my hand, and looked away from me, and said, "Edward, I am so glad—so glad that you have come back."

As we talked I watched Wilmay. The glimpse that I had had of her in the Park had been deceptive. Driving in the fresh wind must have brought the colour to her cheeks, and I suppose even if one is sad at heart one still laughs passably well in public if one's companion says an amusing thing. Now she was very pale, and when she was not talking or conscious that any one was looking at her, her expression was wistful and her eyes seemed fixed on something far away.

"Wilmay," I said, "are you really quite well?"

"Oh, quite!"

"There is nothing the matter with her," said Bertha; "but she is tired. She has to go about so much, and see so many people.

WILMAY

There are Carrones innumerable, all anxious to inspect her."

"If she's quite well," I said, "she doesn't look it. And unless she can manage to look it, she shan't be married at all."

"Please do not let us talk about me any more," said Wilmay. "I want to know all about the opera. We've heard it, of course. Everybody's heard it, and everybody's talking of it. But I want to hear the history of it."

"And I'm sick to death of the opera," I replied, "and I want to hear the history of your engagement."

But on that point Wilmay was absolutely mute, and let Bertha answer for her.

As the days went on, and I saw more of Wilmay, I grew more uneasy. She admired Sir Vincent, and was fond of him in a way, but it did not strike me that she was in love with him. Sometimes I thought I saw a doubt on his honest, handsome face. Sometimes even Bertha herself would look a little anxious when she spoke of Wilmay.

The time sped—flew, it seemed to me—more swiftly to catastrophe, as a moth to a flame. It was less than a week before the day fixed for the marriage that I got a note from Wilmay in the afternoon :

"DEAR EDWARD,—We were to have dined with Lady Harston to-night, but Lady Harston has been the angel to have one of her neuralgic attacks (poor dear!) and put every one off. We have a night's peace. Bertha and you

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and I dine together here, and you play to us afterwards. You will, won't you? Not even Vincent will be here. We are quite alone, and we both want to see you. Do be good to your loving Bertha and Wilmay."

I went, of course. When I got into the drawing-room I noticed that the piano was no longer used like the back yard of a curiosity-shop, but was allowed to be merely a piano.

"No," said Bertha, "you needn't give me the credit or the discredit of it. That's Wilmay. I suppose when you've written great operas you expect that kind of homage?"

"I have not written great operas, but I have a tiresome and offensive sister: which sounds like Ollendorf, but is only the gospel truth. Wilmay, I am indebted to you. I will talk to you, to the entire exclusion of that elderly female at whose house you board."

"Oh, do stop!" cried Bertha. "You shouldn't say things like that to any one with any imagination. I feel as if I lived in Bloomsbury, and charged extra for the boots. I feel old, and dishonest, and haggard."

"Do you?" I said. "Well, we realize the truth about ourselves sooner or later."

"Very well," Bertha retorted, "I shall ring and order Mr. Derrimer's carriage."

"Mr. Derrimer came in a cab," I replied, "and he will not go until he has had dinner, anyhow. And, by the way——"

Carter opened the door, I gave my arm to

Wilmary, and we passed into the dining-room. We were all three in a state of pleasant but foolish high spirits. Wilmary was particularly audacious ; her eyes were very bright, and her colour a little feverish. She told us a beautiful story of how she had really composed that opera, but I had stolen it, and she had never exposed me in order to save me the pain of knowing that I had for my ward a girl whose guardian was a thief. But all through dinner she never made the least allusion to her approaching marriage, and when Bertha spoke of it Wilmary at once changed the subject.

After dinner I went to the piano. The evening of Wilmary's sixteenth birthday came back to my mind. She was wearing the string of little pearls that I had given her then. At first I looked at her from time to time as I played. She sat half in shadow, her lips a little parted, her eyes fixed. There had always been something of another world about her, and to-night as she sat listening to the music she seemed more than ever ethereal, spiritual. Her marriage turned to an insult, a tragedy, in my mind. I took my eyes from her, and became lost in the music. I was playing the Chopin nocturne that I had played on the night of her birthday.

Suddenly I heard a rustling of dresses. The door opened, and closed again quickly. I stopped playing and looked up. Bertha and Wilmary had gone, and I was alone in the room. An indefinable sense of horror and pain came over me. I was glad when a minute

or so later Bertha came back again. She looked troubled.

“What is the matter?” I asked. “What has happened?”

“Did you not see?”

“No.”

“Wilmay began to cry, and got up. I went out with her, and I’ve left her upstairs. She told me to come down again.”

“Is she still crying?”

“Yes; she is lying on her bed and sobbing violently. She does not seem able to tell me what’s the matter with her. Indeed, she says that nothing’s the matter.”

“There must be some explanation.”

“She is in a nervous, over-wrought state, and music always has a great effect upon her. But I do not understand it myself. I have never seen her lose her self-control like this before. And I thought that at dinner she seemed unusually bright and happy.”

“Is anyone with her now?”

“Yes; I think Mrs. Blayd is there.” Bertha sighed. “Oh, this is horrible!” she exclaimed petulantly.

There was a long pause. Bertha sat with her head on her hand. I paced the room, and then stopped. Before I could speak Bertha burst out:

“I know what you’re going to say, Edward, I know what you’re going to say.”

“Very likely,” I replied, “but I shall say it. Wilmay’s marriage must not take place.

She is not in love with Vincent. You must break it off. There is time yet, and you or I must do it."

"I don't know whether it will surprise you, but since your return, only a few days ago, I asked Wilmay if she would like me to break it off. She said most emphatically that she would not hear of it, that she had considered everything when she accepted. She even asked me not to speak of it again. But tonight, just now when I took her upstairs, I did hint at it. She would only say, 'No! no!' and once, 'Why must I make people unhappy?' It's not my fault, is it? I am so fond of Wilmay."

Bertha looked at me with tears in her eyes.

"No," I said, "you need not blame yourself. I am glad you suggested it. Now we can do nothing—she is no longer a child, and she must make her own choice. But somehow I can't bring myself to think that this marriage is really going to take place."

It never did take place. On the morning before the day, I received a note from Bertha asking me to come round at once. I found Bertha looking white and ill, with a letter in her hands.

"Wilmay has gone," she said at once.

"Gone?"

"Yes; left London. Thank heaven, she has Mrs. Blayd with her! She went early this morning, before I was up, and this note was brought to me."

I took the note and glanced through it.

“ In the night, Bertha, I found that I could not do it. I had to go away. I got up and found Mrs. Blayd, and talked to her, and we shall leave London early this morning. I have written to Vincent. And I will write to you again, when I know where we shall be. Will you please let me be quite alone for some time ? Oh, dear Bertha, I do love you so much. Do, do forgive me ! As soon as you get the address, write and tell me that you are not angry. I cannot help it. I should go mad if I didn't go away.”

I had a long talk with Bertha. It was publicly announced that owing to the illness of Miss Amory her marriage with Sir Vincent Carrone was postponed. Later and more gradually it became known that the marriage would not take place at all.

Vincent behaved finely. He would not allow anyone to say a word against Wilmay, and quarrelled lastingly with his own brother on the subject. To me he said, “ Edward ”—by this time he had got into the habit of calling me by my first name—“ it's bad, but it's best for her. She tried to love me, I know that. If I can ever do anything, in some other way, to make her happy, you will let me know. That is really all I want now—it is horrible to think of her as being unhappy, and that I am the cause of it.”

He had the luck some five years afterwards to be killed in the hunting-field.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Wilmay and Mrs. Blayd left London, they went to Starley, a south-coast village where, I believe, Mrs. Blayd had some relations. Before they had been there very long, what had been merely an excuse became the actual fact. Wilmay was seriously ill. Bertha and I went down to Starley then, and took a specialist with us. He said that in some respects the case puzzled him, but he seemed quite hopeful, and suggested Mentone for the winter. I saw Wilmay only for a few minutes on this occasion, and she spoke very little. It was terrible to see the change that had taken place in her.

Bertha and Wilmay went away together. I remained in London, working hard at my second opera. I heard frequently from Bertha, and the reports of Wilmay's health grew worse and worse. She was longing to get back to England, and her greatest desire was to live at Sinden again. After a good deal of consultation it was decided to let her have her own way, supposing that I could make the necessary arrangements. At this time Sinden was let on lease, and when the tenant was asked to give up the remainder of his lease he first laughed at me, and then got angry and said that he was insulted. However, Wilmay was wealthy enough to allow me to

use a form of argument which does not often fail, and it did not fail in this case. So in the spring Bertha and Wilmay came back to the house where Philip Amory died. Bertha refused to leave Wilmay now—even for the delights of the London season.

About this time I had a letter from Charles Forland. I had heard from him once before, but that was merely to give the name of the bank to which he wished me to pay the money to his credit. This second letter was very different, and a great surprise to me. It returned me all the money that I advanced to him with five per cent. interest. It also enclosed one thousand pounds, which was to be paid to Wilmay as a first instalment in discharge of the debt which he had incurred to her father.

“It may be,” he wrote, “that when I am poor I am a blackguard, but I am quite certain that when I am rich I am a sentimentalist. For of course I am under no legal obligation to pay Wilmay anything. I choose to consider myself in debt to her, but the money advanced to me by her parents was (as I always explained to them, though latterly they always refused to listen) advanced in order that I might invest it for them at my discretion, and not as a loan. The trouble was that in those days I had no discretion. Even afterwards, when I had the superb idea of the Compactum Dinner, I was not discreet, or I should have kept the money that I made. One lives and learns. I am

now perfectly discreet. I have written to Wilmay, you will be sorry to hear, to explain myself to her. It is a pity the marriage was broken off."

I wrote to thank him, returning his five per cent., and explaining that I was not a money-lender. I also said that there was no necessity on earth for him to write to Wilmay, and I was very sorry he had done it.

Wilmay's health had seemed to improve with marvellous rapidity at Sinden. Bertha was very hopeful, and in high spirits. She wrote to me to say that Wilmay had heard from her uncle, and that she took it quietly, asked a few questions about him, and then seemed not to think about it any more. Wilmay wanted me to come down to Sinden, and Bertha pressed me most warmly to come too. I had been thinking over things, and I had decided what I would do.

Firstly, I went down to Sinden. Wilmay looked very delicate and sweet; she was less weak than I had expected, and loved to sit out in the sun in the garden on warm days. I talked to her a little, and then I had a longer talk with the doctors, and I think they told me more than they had told Bertha. Then, when Wilmay was asleep upstairs, and Bertha and I were alone together, I said to Bertha;

"Do you know that I love Wilmay—that I have been in love with her ever since she grew out of childhood?"

Bertha paused before she answered.

"Once, years ago, I feared it. Then I did not think so any longer."

"I believe," I said, "that I shall tell her now."

"Yes," said Bertha quietly. "Tell her."

On the next day, when I was sitting in the garden with Wilmay, she spoke of her uncle.

"I know what you did for me," she said. "You wanted to spare me pain and humiliation, and you were going to pay a thousand pounds just for that little thing. I can't speak about it, but I must thank you."

"But, Wilmay, as it happens, I did not pay a penny. Let's forget about that man. It's nothing."

"Edward, why have you always been so good to me? I'm not worth it, and I give you ever so much trouble."

"Do you remember, Wilmay," I said, "that shortly after you came out I went away for years, and did not see you? Do you know why I went?"

"Why?"

"Because I was growing old, because I was not the man who should marry you, and because I loved you."

"Edward! Edward!" she cried breathless.

"Don't mind about it, dear; it can't matter now."

"Matter? It matters all the world. Oh, haven't you seen? I didn't want you to see, but in spite of that——"

WILMAY

“Wilmay, darling, I have always loved you. I love you now.”

She sighed, and held out her hands to me. I drew her close to me, and looked down into her eyes.

* * * *

Wilmay said that she was going to be quite well again now. That was terrible for me to hear, who had been made almost sure that she would not be long with us. But for a time it went on—that delusion of growing health and strength. And with all their sadness, these were the happiest months of my life, and Wilmay said that they were the happiest of her own—happy, though there was in them the solemnity of love and the solemnity of the approaching end. Once only did she speak of Vincent at this time, and once again shortly before her death, when she said that she wanted to know that he had forgiven her. She did know that before she died.

Of those months I cannot write. They need not words but music.

Before the winter the change came, very suddenly and very rapidly. A sea voyage was spoken of and abandoned. She knew that she was going to die.

“And let me die quietly,” she pleaded, “with Edward near me. We have been away from each other so long.”

As the end drew near, and she grew weaker and weaker, a change seemed to come over all in the house too, for they all loved her.

Customary formalities and restraints gave way, and there were strange mixtures of tragedy and farce. I remember that old Carter broke down once, and apologized for it. Bertha tried to answer him kindly, but without losing her dignity, and then she began to cry too. She found herself taking his hand, for the first time in her life.

Wilmay died in her sleep. We had the first snow of the winter that night. It fell heavily, and in the morning all the fields were glistening white as if Wilmay . . .

If you have ever loved, you will imagine, and you will know that I cannot write any more.

THE DOLL

CHAPTER I

“ A WAX doll, please,” said the woman, and the shopman, conjecturing from her appearance the amount she would spend, showed her something at two shillings.

Certainly, Miss Mordaunt was not wealthy, and did not look wealthy. Her dress was severely plain. She might have looked much prettier than she did, for she had fine eyes and beautiful dark hair. She would not cut her hair, but she packed it into the smallest possible compass, converting the glory of the woman into a neat hard parcel. Her age was thirty-two, and she earned thirty shillings a week.

But the two-shilling doll did not please her.

“ Not made to take off, I see,” she said rather disdainfully.

“ No, miss,” the shopman admitted; “ but we have a better article here with the removable clothing. Four-and-two this one. A nice thing.” Miss Mordaunt took it up tenderly. She made it shut and open its eyes ; but it did not satisfy her.

“ I think,” she said, “ the—er—the little girl would prefer a larger one.” Her hesitation in this speech was due to the fact that she was

unused to deceit. The doll was not intended for any little girl ; there was no little girl in the question.

Finally, Miss Mordaunt (who made thirty shillings a week) bought an eight-shilling doll.

"Practically a work of art," said the shopman, as he folded soft paper about it and packed it in its box. "A very nice thing indeed. Sure to give pleasure." Really, he seemed almost reluctant to part with it. He tried to turn the conversation to the toy gyroscope and the animated skeleton, "an ingenious little thing." But Miss Mordaunt said gravely that she did not require anything further.

She departed with the doll in its box. The box had a neat little loop of string for her to hold it by, but she did not use the loop. She nursed the box in the fold of her arm.

There was much noise at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. Motor omnibuses banged and rattled, impatient to get on with their load of home-returning clerks. A cabman flicked a barking dog with the end of his whip, and the dog howled. Boys shouted "Football edition." There was so much noise that what Miss Mordaunt said to the box on her arm was quite inaudible.

She said : "Soon be home now, darling."

Yet Miss Mordaunt was not insane. Insane people cannot earn thirty shillings a week in the office of a Holborn cycle manufacturer, as Miss Mordaunt did. She had gone there at eighteen shillings a week, and in four years she

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had made this considerable advance. Even now the manager considered that she was well worth her money. Mr. Fort, who kept the books, said that Miss Mordaunt was "a bit snappy," but he admired her. The old woman who cleaned out the office considered that she was "a nice spoken lady." James, who took longer over an errand than any other boy in London, said that Miss Mordaunt was not his style, so far as looks were concerned, but that she was all right so long as you didn't start monkeying. Different people have different ideas about the same person, but there would have been a unanimous opinion that Miss Mordaunt was quite sane, and Harley Street would have endorsed that opinion.

Yet Miss Mordaunt, aged thirty-two, had just bought an eight-shilling doll for herself and for nobody else.

Why? She was a woman. Fate had made her a worker, the office was making her a machine, and Edith Stafford was trying to make her a fighter. She was all alone, and no man loved her; but she was a woman, and the very same thing made her buy that doll that has made other women perform the greatest acts of courage and self-sacrifice. If you like you may call it the maternal instinct.

Even the purchase of a doll involved some self-sacrifice for this woman with thirty shillings a week. She lived in a tiny flat in a back street, and did everything for herself. The flat consisted of two small rooms and a box of a kitchen, and everything in it was intensely

neat and orderly. The little flat had marked an advance; at eighteen shillings a week she had been discontented with a single room and much discomfort. But now—why, this was her home, and she had almost all that she wanted, but not quite all.

She lifted the doll out of its box, kissed it, patted its hair, smoothed its clothes, and made it sit down on a chair. She said: "You must wait just a few minutes, Cynthia. Be good."

She put the box with the other card-boxes that she had kept because they might be useful on the top of her wardrobe; she lit the gas-ring in the kitchen, and put on the kettle. Then she prepared her supper. There was a tinned tongue in the cupboard, and that tongue had certainly formed part of her intentions; but if you have been buying eight-shilling dolls, you can do very well on cocoa, bread, and apricot jam—the last being used with great restraint. So the tin remained unopened. We all eat far too much, anyhow. All this while Cynthia had waited patiently, and had been good, as directed; but now she was brought up to the table, and Miss Mordaunt talked to her a little during the banquet.

"Much nicer than that stuffy shop, isn't it, Cynthia? And what do you think I am going to do after supper? I'm going to make you the very doviest white silk nightgown you ever saw. You'll be quite a princess and you shall have a little cot by the side of your mother's bed, and be ever so happy."

Miss Mordaunt did not always speak quite so

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prettily as this. If she was typing a letter at the office and the machine jibbed, she habitually said one brief bad word. It always made Mr. Fort laugh, and that laugh always made Miss Mordaunt very angry. She was never angry with the old woman who cleaned the office.

As she worked at the white silk nightdress she gave Cynthia information in a low voice. Miss Mordaunt confessed that so far she had been lonely. She had girl-friends, of course—plenty of them—but she had always wanted a little girl of her own. She might have bought a dog, but who was to look after him while his mistress was away at work? Cynthia was better than six dogs.

Fortunately Cynthia had permanently an expression of pleased attention, obliterated only when you laid her on her back and by a simple mechanical contrivance her eyes closed. Miss Mordaunt was explaining to Cynthia what a remarkably good time she was going to have, when a light ripple of piano music broke in on the conversation, stopped, and then began again.

“Hear that?” said Miss Mordaunt. “I’ll tell you what it means, Cynthia. It means that they’ve let the flat next door at last, and that the girl moved in to-day. We shall have to come to some agreement with her about that piano. She seems to play very well, but there must be regular hours for it. I can’t hold a meeting of the W.W.L.S. in my rooms with that noise going on. And as I’ve

got to earn the bread-and-butter all day I can't afford to be kept awake by a piano half the night. I'll tackle the good lady on the subject before I go to work to-morrow. And now, Cynthia, we'll see how you look in your new nightdress."

But for the moment this operation had to be deferred. There came a sharp rap at the outer door, and Cynthia and all that belonged to her were hurriedly deposited in the bedroom. Then Miss Mordaunt admitted Miss Edith Stafford.

Miss Stafford was tall, thin, jerky, and plain. Her eyes peered bitterly from behind a gold-rimmed pince-nez. She did not kiss Miss Mordaunt; she abhorred all unhygienic things, especially if they were at all natural. Cigarettes were an exception.

"Evenin', Grace," said Miss Stafford. "Looked in to see why you weren't at the W.W.L.S. last night."

"I'd had an awfully hard day. I didn't feel up to it."

"Nonsense," said Miss Stafford, taking a manly pose in the arm-chair, and producing a leather cigarette case.

The W.W.L.S. was the Working Women's Literary Society. It consisted of seven members, and held fortnightly meetings. Had it consisted of more than seven they could hardly have met in Miss Mordaunt's sitting-room when her turn came round; even as it was, two bedroom chairs had to be impressed for these great occasions.

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"Nonsense," repeated Miss Stafford. "Women are only tired because they think they are—it's one of the ways in which the ordinary woman makes herself ridiculous and keeps back the movement. Still, you didn't miss much this time. Margaret Jackson lost her temper as usual. About Keats. By the way, she said something to me about you afterwards."

"Indeed? What was it?"

"That man Fort. Do you mean to marry him?"

"Never. Of course not. Why?"

"Margaret Jackson heard through a friend of hers, who knows Fort's young brother, that Fort said you had been much pleasanter in your manner of late."

"Then Mr. Fort will change his mind about that to-morrow."

"Good," said Edith Stafford with a jerk of her cigarette-hand. "This is no time for women to marry. My word, if all the pretty girls thought as I do about that, women would be free within a year. I'm glad you're with me at any rate."

Grace Mordaunt blushed slightly. She thought that Mr. Fort was common, uneducated, and unprepossessing. But she also thought that she was very lonely. A further irruption of music spared her any discussion of matrimony.

"What a horrible row!" said Miss Stafford.

"Yes," said Grace. "It's the girl next door. I'm going to speak about it to-morrow."

“ I should. One can hardly hear one’s self talk. Well, I only looked in for two minutes.”

She jerked her cigarette-end into the fireplace, reminded Miss Mordaunt that it was her turn to entertain the W.W.L.S. at their next meeting, and said a brief good-night.

When she had gone, Miss Mordaunt undressed Cynthia and tried on the white silk nightgown. Alterations were required in the neck, and were duly effected. Miss Mordaunt went to sleep that night with the doll in her arms.

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CHAPTER II

AFTER breakfast next morning Miss Mordaunt went to remonstrate with the girl next door about the piano. She meant to arrange it all in a friendly chat—to point out that there must be a certain amount of give-and-take in flats.

The plan was modified in its execution by the fact that there was no girl next door. The proprietor of the piano was a man—an enraged, fantastic, middle-aged, male musician, who had a fine flow of language, but behaved much like a distraught and irritable baby.

His name was Malcolm Harverson, and he was a musician and composer, as he told her before she had got through the first two sentences of what she had to say.

He glared at her with large, blue eyes.

He ran his good, white hands through his excessive crop of fair hair. He gesticulated.

“What am I to do? What on earth do you expect me to do? Do you know I’ve been turned out of more flats than any man in London? The other tenants always combine against me. At last I thought I was safe. There are no regulations whatever about piano-playing in these flats—not the shadow of a ghost of a regulation. I was jolly careful to find that out before I took this dog-kennel, and on the second morning after my arrival I’ve hardly finished my breakfast—beastly eggs

that I had to cook for myself because I can't find a servant—when a charmin' lady comes round to tell me to burn my Bechstein and go to the devil."

Miss Mordaunt resisted with some difficulty a tendency to smile at this elderly child. "I don't think that's quite what I said, is it? You can play as much as you like until six in the evening, and some evenings you can play from six to ten, unless I ask you not to, but not after ten, because——"

Mr. Malcolm Harverson clasped his head with both hands. "Oh, wait a minute, please! How do you expect anybody to remember all that? I can't get up at six in the morning, and as for ten at night—why, there are lots of days when I don't really begin to live till ten at night. There ought to be a certain amount of give-and-take in flats"—Miss Mordaunt was slightly disconcerted by this phrase, which she had intended to use herself—"and nobody ever hears me complain. There's a woman in the flat over mine who has got a sewing-machine in C minor. Perfectly beastly. Yet I don't go running round, as you do, shouting to have her crucified."

Miss Mordaunt tried to explain that she neither ran nor shouted. She did not require him to burn his piano. She did not want him to be crucified. But as she had to rise early to get the work of her flat done before she went to the office at ten——

"That reminds me," said Mr. Harverson. The way in which he interrupted ladies was

quite shameless. "I suppose you couldn't tell me of any old woman who'd come in and do the work of this flat for me. If she arrived somewhere about eight in the morning, and looked in again in the evening in the neighbourhood of nine, that would——"

"Perhaps I might be able to find somebody," said Miss Mordaunt. "But that's not what I wanted to talk about."

She explained once more what it was that she wanted. He remained quite unsatisfactory. He would do his best, but he didn't like to make any promises because (so he said) he knew his limitations, and he might forget. By the way, he hoped she would not forget to find that servant for him, because really things were getting rather serious.

Miss Mordaunt had to hurry away in order to be punctual at her business. She had two minutes with Mrs. Fagg, the old woman who cleaned the office.

"Yes," said Mrs. Fagg. "I could do this Mr. 'Arverson if he suited me, and the work would fit in nicely. He's all right, miss, I suppose?"

"Yes, I think so. But he's like most men—not fit to take care of himself."

"Then I'll just call on him this morning and judge for myself, saying as you sent me. Thank you, in any case, miss."

Miss Mordaunt enjoyed the day's work which followed more than Mr. Fort did.

Mr. Fort was not in the least in love with Miss Mordaunt, but he had determined that

she would be just the right wife for him. She was good-looking. She was thoroughly sensible and practical. A little short in the temper—but Mr. Fort recognized that he had reached an age when a man must not be too particular, and that one may have to wait a long time for absolute perfection. Besides, once married, he thought that he could deal with that shortness of temper. Certainly of late she had been distinctly more civil to him.

Therefore Mr. Fort this morning adopted a manner towards Miss Mordaunt which was oleaginous and slightly intimate. What Miss Mordaunt said could have been telegraphed for sixpence, but it was enough, metaphorically, to take the skin off Mr. Fort. He observed to a friend at luncheon that women were queer cattle.

A stream of music greeted Miss Mordaunt that night as she came up the stairs. Mr. Malcolm Harverson was singing to his own accompaniment. He had a very fair baritone voice, and it had been well trained. Above all, he was an artist. Miss Mordaunt was in the mood for music, and was glad that Mr. Harverson had apparently forgotten her injunction. But the moment she closed her door the music stopped abruptly. So Miss Mordaunt talked to Cynthia instead. Cynthia was sitting, curiously enough, just where Miss Mordaunt had left her in the morning—on the cushions of the one easy chair—and she still wore the expression of pleased attention.

Miss Mordaunt said that Cynthia had be-

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haved very nicely, and that she was pleased to see her again. Then she spoke about the music. "It would have been more sensible, Cynthia, if he had just finished that song and then left off. Men are always so stupidly literal. Or perhaps he's turned sulky. I suppose you couldn't tell me if he's been playing much during the day."

She was correct. Cynthia could not.

Miss Mordaunt was opening that tinned tongue with her accustomed neatness, when she was called to the door. A man asked if she were Miss Mordaunt, and—assured on this point—delivered a florist's box into her hands. It contained white roses and the card of Mr. Malcolm Harverson. On the card was written : "With many thanks for the much more useful present you sent me this morning—I refer to Mrs. Fagg."

Since he put it like that she felt that she might accept them. She loved flowers, but her expenditure upon them was of necessity limited. She placed the white roses on her supper-table, and invited Cynthia to admire them. Then she did devastating work on that tinned tongue—one might almost have thought that tinned tongue did not cost money. But Miss Mordaunt was happy and hungry. Later in the evening she wrote a brief note of thanks to Mr. Harverson, and she made a fur toque for Cynthia.

CHAPTER III

DAYS passed away, and every day Mr. Harverson's piano stopped dumb when Miss Mordaunt returned from her work in the evening. It was silly of him to sulk in this way, and she made up her mind that she would tell him so. It was only on special evenings, which would be indicated to him, that she required silence from six till ten. On the other evenings it would be quite enough if the piano stopped at ten or thereabouts. The meeting of the W.W.L.S. in her rooms gave her an opportunity.

Miss Mordaunt possessed just six tea-cups, but the members of the W.W.L.S. had the Wordsworthian habit of being seven. She was preparing her room for the meeting when she remembered the necessity for one more cup. She had meant to acquire it during the day, and had forgotten it. It struck her now that she might borrow a tea-cup from Mr. Harverson, and she could at the same time explain to him that she did not hate music so much as he thought.

He showed no sign of sulkiness when he admitted her to his flat. He made her come into his sitting-room while he went to find a cup which was worthy of being used by a literary society. The sitting-room was principally occupied by a short grand piano and many

books. It smelled pleasantly of Russia-leather and Turkish cigarettes.

As he came back with the tea-cup he asked plaintively if there would soon be an evening when he might play after six.

"You might have played any of these evenings. It was only on evenings when I especially asked for quiet that you were not to play."

He sat down suddenly and nearly broke the tea-cup.

"That's me," he said. "If I can get anything the wrong way round I always do. I thought it was only on evenings when I received a special permission that I was allowed to play. Of course, I had to do what you wanted—after all your kindness in getting Mrs. Fagg for me ; but I've been feeling very virtuous and conceited about it. Why, it's simply a case of the 10.5 over again."

"What was that ?" asked Miss Mordaunt, smiling.

"I had to go North to a rehearsal of some stuff of mine. I looked up a train, and fixed on the 10.5. That was all right. But then the thing that I have to use instead of a mind switched the figures round, and I decided that it was the 5.10 I had to catch. I got up very early, and had no time for any breakfast, and I caught the 5.10. At least, I should have caught it if it had been there. There wasn't any 5.10 of course. The porter who told me so laughed, and my own cabman laughed. I wished I was dead."

Miss Mordaunt said she was so sorry, but she seemed rather amused.

"I can't understand it. I cannot understand how anybody with the gift of music, like you, shouldn't be able to manage little practical things."

"Sometimes I doubt if music is a gift at all. I'm inclined to think it's a vice. Anyhow, it's just those little practical things which bowl me over. I believe I ought to advertise for an attendant—one of those men in black morning-coats and felt hats that take the soft-headed old gentlemen out for walks at the health resorts."

"Well," said Miss Mordaunt, "it's most awfully kind of you to have stopped playing on my account, and I'm almost ashamed now that I bothered you about it. Now I've got the literary society, and so I can't ask you to play to-night."

"Of course not."

"But I hope you'll play to-morrow night just as much as you like, and—why, there's somebody at my door. Good-night and thanks so much."

It was Miss Edith Stafford with a note-book containing the minutes of the W.W.L.S. "I'm early," said Miss Stafford. "Thought you might want a hand to get the room ready."

"Thanks, awfully. Everything's all right now. I've just been borrowing a tea-cup."

"Ah!" said Miss Stafford. "The girl next door. I remember. Hope you've persuaded her to stop that tinkle-box of hers to-night."

"Yes, she won't play to-night," said Miss

Mordaunt, blushing. It has already been observed that Miss Mordaunt had no natural tendency towards deceit.

The meeting was quite successful. Miss Tilbury read a thoughtful paper on some obscure passages in the work of Robert Browning; Miss Jackson animadverted severely upon it; Miss Edith Stafford pointed out that it was only men who wrote obscurely: the woman writer was always lucid, at any rate. Miss Tomlin said that this reminded her of a story which she told. It was quite a good story, about a lady who bred prize Persian cats, and nobody knew (or cared) how Miss Tomlin came to be reminded of it. Then there was tea, and Miss Mordaunt drank from a blue cup that did not match the rest of the set. Miss Stafford asked her what the girl next door was like, and Miss Mordaunt, blushing, said that she did not know, and changed the subject rapidly.

Miss Mordaunt told Cynthia in bed that night that it had been quite a pleasant evening. She also acquitted Mr. Harverson of sulkiness, and observed that he seemed to be rather well off—had good furniture, and took cabs, and that sort of thing. To this Cynthia listened patiently, but, from the accident of her position, with her eyes closed.

On the following evening Miss Mordaunt had just finished supper, and was telling Cynthia about some further additions to her wardrobe, when the sound of Mr. Harverson's piano interrupted her. Miss Mordaunt listened with

delight. At the end of the piece she clapped her hands gently by way of applause.

Then there came a knock at the door, and with some confusion she admitted Mr. Harverson.

He stared round the room with his large blue eyes, and they took in Cynthia, whom Miss Mordaunt had forgotten to remove.

But Mr. Harverson, who was not more confused than usual, said nothing whatever about the doll, though Cynthia was wearing the new fur toque and looked charming. He said that he had over-heard the sound of applause, and that if Miss Mordaunt really liked the music she would hear it better on the other side of the wall. Wouldn't she come round with him?

Miss Mordaunt accepted, a little surprised at herself for accepting. She took the one easy chair in the room that smelled of russia leather and cigarettes, and Mr. Harverson demanded what he should play for her.

"If you've got a Beethoven handy, I'm fond of the 'Moonlight Sonata.'"

"Good old 'Moonlight,' " said Mr. Harverson, irreverently. "All the schoolgirls have to go through it just like the measles. But, however——"

And without troubling to find the music Mr. Harverson sat down and played the "Moonlight Sonata," and he did not play irreverently at all.

"I suppose it's old-fashioned," she said, when he had finished, "but it's terribly lovely."

"Yes," said Harverson, "Beethoven's fine.

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Of course, if he'd had the modern piano there'd have been a difference. Still—yes, very fine. I say, Miss Mordaunt, I forgot to have any coffee after dinner to-night, and restaurant coffee's rather rotten, anyhow. I wish you'd help me to make some."

"Won't it keep you awake?"

"No. If I don't have it I can't sleep. I'm all wrongly constituted, and don't fit into the textbooks."

So Miss Mordaunt helped him to make coffee, and afterwards helped him to drink it. She felt it necessary to say that she had not intended her applause to be overheard.

"No," cried Malcolm Harverson, "but these walls are very thin. I can even hear when you're talking to your little friend in the evening. I can't hear what's said, of course, or I'd have warned you, but I catch the murmur of the voice."

"What little friend?" asked Miss Mordaunt, perturbed.

"The doll, of course. You do talk to her, don't you?"

"Y—yes," said Miss Mordaunt. "You see——"

"You needn't explain," said Harverson. "Bless you, I know. That sort of thing is easy to understand. If one didn't understand it one couldn't make music properly."

Harverson and Miss Mordaunt met again the next night, and the next, and the next. Malcolm Harverson and Grace Mordaunt being what they were, the story could have but one

COLLECTED TALES

ending—a happy ending. She was pleased that it was not until after she had accepted him that she read in the papers an account of the Festival, with lavish and unusual praise for a work by Malcolm Harverson.

Miss Edith Stafford said that she had known all along how it would be, and had seen it coming. This prescience seemed to be some slight consolation to her.

THE DOLL

CHAPTER IV

SOME years later, when the newspapers had quite got into the habit of speaking of Malcolm Harverson as "the eminent composer," Mrs. Harverson decided to give her little daughter a doll. She confessed that it was not quite a new doll : in fact, it was one that she had formerly played with herself.

Miss Cynthia Harverson, who had not begun to worry about arithmetic, said that she supposed in that case it would be about a hundred years old.

"Getting on that way," said her mother. "But it's got the loveliest clothes that I made for it myself, and it shuts its eyes when it lies down, and it's got the same name as yourself."

"Let's see," said Miss Harverson.

The doll and its somewhat elaborate wardrobe were produced, and Miss Harverson was delighted with them. But she put one finger in her mouth and sucked it—the sure concomitant in her case of a mental process. Then she observed that her mother must have been no end of a child if she could make doll's clothes like that.

"But I was much older than you are when I made those clothes, dear."

"How old were you?"

"I don't like to think about it—ever so much older than I am now."

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They were still busy about the doll when Grace heard her husband calling her.

"I say, my dear," he said. "I've got to send ten shillings to a man in Brussels. How does one do it?"

Grace crossed the passage to her husband's room. "Give me the letter and the money, I'll do it for you. You haven't changed one little bit," she said, laughing.

Then she sat down, and added seriously, "I've given Cynthia the doll, and she's quite in love with it."

ELLEN RIDER

THE Riders occupied the ground-floor at 115 Champion's Row. They shared the basement and staircase with the Coppinses, who occupied the upper part of the house. Mrs. Rider had, of course, first rights in the kitchen, as she paid more rent than the other family. There were three steps from the street to the front door. By mutual arrangement, the Riders partially cleaned these steps one week, and the Coppinses generally neglected to clean them the next. This is what the arrangement came to practically ; theoretically, the steps were thoroughly cleaned every week by each family, alternately.

Old Rider worked for a pianoforte-maker, and was respectable except at Christmas and on one other selected bank-holiday ; on these occasions he did not arrive home until the small hours, generally slept on the steps outside, and invariably said that he felt all the better for it on the following morning. Further he realized that after a day devoted to the practice of the disreputable, it was his duty to bring home a present for his wife as a peace-offering ; he would be found on the steps in the early dawn, sleeping peacefully, with a small Madeira cake in a paper bag clasped to

his heart. On the last occasion when this had happened, he had brought home a half-hundred of coals; Mrs. Coppins, who was not at all a nice woman, went out privily, while Rider was asleep, and appropriated the coals. She was subsequently accused of theft, and became very indignant; it is never pleasant to be accused of anything that you have really done; she was so indignant that she could not settle down to work, but went and lodged a complaint with the rent-collector, who took no notice of it. Mrs. Rider also lodged a complaint with the rent-collector, and he took no notice of that either. He was a free-speaking young man, with the city appearance strongly accentuated in him, and he said that they were a couple of "silly old devils." As a matter of fact, Mrs. Rider was, when opportunity served, a dressmaker, and a woman of considerable severity.

The consequence was that for a certain period of time Mrs. Rider and Mrs. Coppins did not speak. They made sniffing sounds when they passed one another in the passage; and it was absolutely necessary for them to occasionally make signs in the kitchen. But they did not speak. One morning Mrs. Rider looked disgustedly out of her front-window; then she addressed her daughter Ellen:

"Them Coppinses ain't touched the steps agin this week. I'm ashimed to see 'em. Mucky's no word for 'em."

Ellen said nothing. She had a cause for sympathy with the Coppinses, although she

was well aware that Mrs. Coppins was unattractive, and, when pressed, dishonest. Before the illness of Albert Coppins there had been potentialities in Ellen's life.

"See 'ere, Ellen," Mrs. Rider continued vigorously, "you tike and do those steps yourself; when she gets back from 'er charin' and sees 'em done, per'aps she may be shimed into 'er dooty another week."

"She ain't gone out this mornin'," said Ellen meditatively. "She's nussing of 'er Albut. 'Ow 'e do corf—all lars' night! Likely that's why she's 'ad no time for them steps."

"Oh, I ve no patience with such. There's 'er eldest, Willum, awye in good work and sending of 'er ten bob every week. Albut was mikin' 'is twelve shillin's to my certain knowledge afore 'e was took with 'is lungs. Then she 'as 'er charin'. Then she 'as what she thieves, and that's something, I'll be bound; my pity's for the gentry what employs 'er. If she's no time to do them steps, she could well afford to pye a girl twopence to do 'em for 'er. I knows nothing about Albut."

"You did used to inquire once," Ellen said sadly.

"That was when we was on terms. As long as she could be'ive as a lyedy should, I was civil enough. We don't speak now, thank-yer. You can demean yourself with 'aving of conversyeshuns with 'er if yer like. And," she continued bitterly, "well I know why that is."

Ellen Rider dropped her head at that, and

had nothing to answer. She got her things together and went out on the steps. She took the door-mat out on to the pavement, and shook it actively. She stood still for a moment. She was no longer a drudge doing the work of a drudge. She was a girl of just seventeen, full of life and beauty, with her tawny hair brightened by the September sunlight.

"I wish I 'ad 'im to nuss," she said to herself. "I wish I 'ad 'im to nuss and take care of somewhere where the folk wouldn't talk at yer, and mike yer feel like this." A flash of anger came into her eyes. She turned to her work, and put her fury into it. Her world was too small for her; there was no privacy in it. If she seemed downhearted, they all knew what the reason was; they had made jokes to her about that in the old days, when the Coppinses and the Riders were on friendly terms. The belief that imbecile merri-ment is likely to cheer up the sorrowful obtains too frequently. Now they did not make jokes; they were angry with her for being the weak spot in offensive operations against the Coppinses. Why did they want to notice her at all? Albert was going to die. Only a few months before he had been looking strong, manly, splendid; now he was going to die, she was sure of it. Soon it would all be over. Until then they might at least pretend not to notice her. There was not a room in that house in which she could cry without being made to cry more because she

had cried. She went on vigorously with her work; but the anger was out of her eyes now, and the tears were in them.

The door opened, and Mrs. Coppins came out. She had a basket on her arm.

“’Ow’s Albut?” said Ellen quickly.

“’E’s bad. ’E brought up a lot of blood this mornin’. Doctor’s comin’ this aft’noon agin. I’m doin’ what I can. ’E’s got a fire in ’is room continuous.” She pulled up at once, and changed the subject, for fires are not unconnected with coals. “Why, you’re doin’ of the steps. I ’ad thought as ’ow it was my week for ’em. Well, I’m glad it ain’t. I’ve no ’eart for such things to-dye.” She went down the steps, and then turned back. “It ain’t a matter of more’n a few dyes now. Me and your mother not bein’ on terms ’as made it sort of ’ard, otherwise there was things as I could ’ave bin wishful to speak of.” She glanced at the windows, and then lowered her voice. “’E was content waitin’ at first, and now ’e ’ont wait no longer. Twice ’e’s awst for you. Could you get up to ’im, quiet-like? Jess and Mawgrit’s with ’im just now, but they’d clear out.”

Ellen did not speak, but she nodded her head. She breathed quickly as she gathered together her things, and went into the house. She found her mother in the kitchen. “You cawn’t have done them steps yet,” her mother said.

“See ’ere,” said Ellen, speaking very rapidly. “I ’aven’t never spoke of it afore; it’s bin

bad enough to 'ave you and fawther and the boys mockin' at me and makin' me miserable when I kep' quiet. But now I don't care no longer. You can say what you like. I know 'e's the son of a thief, and I don't care. I don't care for nothin' except that 'e's dying, and wants me, and I'm goin' to 'im. I don't care—I don't, I don't! I love 'im, and I'm goin'."

"Come back this instant, you bad gel," Mrs. Rider called after her. Ellen went on, and her mother took no trouble to enforce her command. In fact, as she continued her kitchen operations she grew rather thoughtful.

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The afternoon wore on; the doctor came and went, and came again. It was late in the evening, before he went finally. Not until some minutes after his departure did Ellen Rider come out of the up-stairs room, alone. She came slowly down the stairs, her eyes were half-closed; her lips were pressed firmly together, but she could not keep her nostrils from twitching slightly. She came into the room where her mother was working at her sewing-machine by the light of a small oil-lamp; her father sat before the fire, smoking; her two brothers were quarrelling over an evening paper. They all looked up when Ellen Rider entered. The three men grinned the grin of facetiousness; all were on the verge of being jocular, when Mrs. Rider suddenly started up.

ELLEN RIDER

“The first one of yer as says a word to that gel, I’ll break ’is ugly ’ead. Come to me then, my Nell, my poor, pretty Nell.”

Later, Mrs. Rider gave Ellen a handful of red roses. “I got them off a barrer; they was cheap as cheap. They did ought to be white properly, only the man ’adn’t no white. You give them to Mrs. Coppins for the corpse from me, and my compliments, and I feels for ’er, and I ’ope as all bygones is bygones.”

Ellen Rider sat down, folded her arms on the table before her, and resting her head upon them began for the first time to cry piteously : “Oh, mother, that ain’t no use. She don’t think of such things not any more. Nothing ain’t anything to ’er to-night.”

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About a fortnight later the young man who collected the rent came jauntily down the partially cleaned steps of 115 Champion’s Row. “Just what I said,” he thought to himself; “one week both quarrel like cats, next week one ’elps to pay t’other’s rent. Couple of silly old devils, I call them.” He went on with a fine air of city cock-surety about him.

A girl of seventeen, with tawny hair, passed him, walking quickly.

“That’s a nice bit of goods,” the young man said to himself. He whistled; the girl took no notice; the young man swore.

SPARKLING BURGUNDY

IN London a day in mid-August drew to its close. The air was motionless, the pavements were hot. Weary children came home with the perambulator from the sand-pit of Regent's Park or the playground of Kensington Gardens. Young men from the city wore straw hats and thronged the outside of motor-omnibuses. Oxford Street, that singularly striving street, was still striving, still exhibiting some of its numerous activities. Starting from a humble and Holborn origin, it lives to touch the lips of Park Lane, but it goes to Bayswater when it dies. It was still protesting that it was not tired and still crowded with traffic. Irregular masses of buildings and heavy dusty trees stood out darkly against a sky of fainting lettuce colour. Young Mrs. Bablove noticed them as she came out of the Tube station, drawing her cloak round her unwonted evening-dress. "Yes," said her husband, as she called his attention to the effect. "Striking." It was scarcely a minute's walk from the station to the Restaurant Merveilleux, where they were to be the guests of Mr. Albert Carver.

The Restaurant Merveilleux does its best. It has an arc-lamp and a medium-sized commissionaire. It bears its name proudly in

gilt letters a foot and a half high. In the entrance are bay trees in green tubs and a framed bill of our celebrated *diner du jour* at half a crown. Within are little tables brightly appointed and many electric lights. A mahogany screen is carved with challenging pine-apples and grapes, and against it is a table for six. Mr. Carver had reserved this table. Yet somehow one gets the correct impression that this is a small eating-house under Italian proprietorship.

The occasion of the little dinner given by this bachelor and *viveur* was the engagement of Ada Bunting to Harold Simcox. Albert Carver had received much hospitality from Miss Bunting's parents. He had as nearly as possible got engaged to Miss Bunting himself, and now knew what the condemned man feels like who is unexpectedly reprieved. Miss Bunting and Mr. Simcox were the guests of importance. She was lymphatic and pale-haired; her future husband was smaller and a shade shorter than she. He concentrated on politeness, and made anyone to whom he spoke feel like a possible customer. As for Mr. and Mrs. Bablove, Mr. Albert Carver had always intended to ask them, if he ever asked anybody. He frankly admired young Mrs. Bablove, and said so, and was slightly pleased when this created surprise and it was suggested that she was hardly his type. It seemed to imply that Mr. Carver was a problem, and this was subtly flattering to Mr. Carver—who, if a problem, was singularly soluble. It

is true none the less that the women whom Albert Carver admired were mostly fleshy and exuberant. Mrs. Bablove looked like an angel who had gone into domestic service—a soul in servitude. She had to make a just-sufficient income suffice, and as she was devoted to her husband and her two little boys she did a good deal of work herself. She had a sweet and rather childish nature, was not without some true æsthetic perception, and under less stringent limitations might have developed further. Mr. Bablove, a very quiet and prosaic man, who wore spectacles only when he was reading, made about the same income as Mr. Carver. They both held responsible positions in the same firm. They both lived in the same street in the Shepherd's Bush neighbourhood. But Mr. Bablove's income had to provide for a household, and Mr. Albert Carver's income was all ear-marked for Mr. Albert Carver. There was less splendour in Mr. Bablove's house than in Mr. Carver's wicked flat with the hookah (from the cut-price tobacconist) standing on the low inlaid table and the French photogravure of a bathing subject over the mantelpiece.

The remaining guest was Miss Adela Holmes. She was beautiful and looked Oriental. Her movements (after office-hours) were slow and very graceful. Her voice was soft and languorous; her eyes also spoke. During the day she was the third quickest typist in London, and ran her own office strictly on business lines. Mr. Carver in his light way would

COLLECTED TALES

sometimes call her "Nirvana"; he was convinced that this was an Eastern term of endearment, and, though an allusion to her appearance, permissible in a platonic friend who had known her for years.

Mr. Carver surveyed his little party with pleasure. It was not the celebrated half-crown dinner that was being served for this Lucullus; it was the rich man's alternative—the *diner de luxe* at four-and-six. Mr. Carver always said that if he did a thing at all he liked to do it well. He was a man of middle stature and middle age. His hair was very black and intensely smooth. His face suggested a commercial Napoleon. He was dressed with some elaboration; pink coral buttons constrained his white waistcoat over a slight protuberance. Other diners at other tables were not so dressed—not dressed for the evening at all. One blackguard had entered in a suit of flannels and a straw hat. But other tables had not the profusion of smilax and carnations which graced the table reserved for Mr. Carver's party. A paper simulation of chrysanthemums was good enough for the half-crowners. How could they expect the eager attendance given to Mr. Carver's party? The frock-coated proprietor hovered near the mahogany screen. The head-waiter, at a side-table, took the neck of a bottle of sparkling burgundy between his dusky hands and caused it to rotate vigorously in the ice-pail. This does not really make that curious wine any the worse. Another waiter handed up for Mr.

SPARKLING BURGUNDY

Carver's approval the *chef's* attempt to make a lobster look like a sunset on the Matterhorn.

"Looks almost too good to eat," said Adela Holmes drowsily.

Mr. Carver laughed joyously. "Think so, Nirvana? Well, we'll try it."

The wonder had not yet quite gone out of the soft brown eyes of Dora Bablove. This was luxury indeed. It was a new way of living that she had never known; in the course of her married life she had dined out very rarely, and never after this manner. Somehow she felt as if she was not Dora Bablove at all.

The proprietor made a suggestion to Mr. Carver. "Good idea, signor," said Mr. Carver. "You'd like an electric fan, Mrs. Bablove, wouldn't you?"

It was done in a moment. An electric lamp was taken out, and something plugged in its place. A gentle whir, with a hint of an aeroplane in it. A cool breeze that fluttered the pendent smilax.

"I think you're being very well looked after," said Mrs. Bablove timidly.

"You've got it," said Mr. Carver with conviction. "That's just the advantage of a little place like this. I'm here pretty often, and the signor knows me; and—oh, well, I dare say he thinks it worth his while to keep my custom. I assure you I get an amount of personal attention here that I never get at the Ritz." As Mr. Carver had never been to the Ritz this is credible.

COLLECTED TALES

"I like being looked after," said Mrs. Bablove. "I like to think that so many people are taking so much trouble to please me."

"I should think—er—that that must always happen," said the polite Mr. Simcox on her other side.

"Not a bit," laughed Dora. "As a rule, I take all the trouble. Ask Teddy if I don't."

But nobody asked Teddy. Mr. Bablove was discussing palmistry with Miss Bunting, who thought there might be something in it, and with Miss Holmes, who was quite expert and offered to read his hand.

Mr. Carver said, in his whimsical way, that he thought Mrs. Bablove should drink and forget it. He watched her as she touched with her full lips the magenta foam in her glass. He had never seen Mrs. Bablove in a low dress before; certainly she had a charm. The conversation grew animated. The question of London in August was settled. London empty? Not a bit of it. That was the old idea. Why, this year, with the House sitting, half the best people were still in London. You could walk through Mayfair and see for yourself.

Mrs. Bablove was not deeply interested in the question. She knew that Teddy and Mr. Carter would take their holidays just when the firm decided. She was more interested in the people in the room. The blackguard in the flannel suit had finished his lager and had attempted to light a pipe; it had been politely explained to him that pipes were not

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permissible. At a little table in the corner were a man with a saturnine face and a very young girl in red. They drank champagne, talked low and confidentially, and paid no attention to anybody. Dora Bablove had strayed into a world previously unexplored by her.

More and more the conviction came on her that the Dora who was unwrapping the vine-leaf from the fat quail on her plate was not the Dora who had been married six years, who looked after her two little boys so well, who mended, and cleaned, and did rather clever things with the rest of the cold mutton. She was for the moment a woman untrammelled by circumstances. She delighted in it, enjoyed it desperately, and was half afraid of it. Had this Dora quite the same ideas about—well, about what was right?

The girl in red had lit a cigarette now, and she was getting rather angry with the man who was with her. Dora thought he was making her angry on purpose. She wondered why. She asked Mr. Carver.

Mr. Carver shook his head. A mistake to make the ladies angry—that was what he always thought. But some of them had tempers. Now—well, he mustn't say that.

"Oh, go on, you must," said Dora.

"Well, I was only going to say that appearances are deceptive. You look at first sight as if you had the most placid nature in the world. But I think you could get angry, Mrs. Bablove—very angry."

"Oh, no. Quite wrong. Whatever makes you think that?"

"There's a look in the eyes sometimes. Oh, I assure you it makes me very careful," laughed Mr. Carver. "Frightens me. Now, really, Mrs. Bablove, you must have a little yellow Chartreuse with your coffee."

But Mrs. Bablove was resolute in her refusal. She did not care in the least about such things. She had drunk one glass of the sparkling burgundy, not to be out of the picture, and after that had sipped iced water. At the other end of the table "Nirvana" was saying that she didn't see why she shouldn't—two other women in the room had set the example. And with that she accepted a cigarette from Mr. Bablove's silver case. The smoke wandered gently through the smilax plantation, and left hurriedly when it met the electric fan.

And now Mr. Simeox had to take Miss Bunting home, for Miss Bunting lived in remote Wimbledon and in an early household, and the privilege of the latch-key was not accorded to her. Mr. Simeox, who had not refused the yellow Chartreuse or anything else, was slightly flushed and more polite than ever. He assured his host that it had been the pleasantest evening of his life and he should never forget it. Even the lymphatic Miss Bunting had become quite animated. At the beginning of the dinner they had maintained towards one another a pre-concerted air of dignified reserve, but that was now quite broken down.

Mr. Carver rose to see them to their cab.

"And if anybody else tries to go," he said to the rest of his guests, "I shall lose my temper."

"Might have got a box at one of the halls if I'd thought about it," said Mr. Carver on his return. It was a well-meant effort of the imagination. He might, but it would have been unlike him.

"Much pleasanter where we are," said Miss Holmes languorously. "Performances always bore me."

"Ah, well, Nirvana," said Mr. Carver, "so long as you're pleased——"

Miss Holmes turned again to Mr. Bablove. His wife hoped that Teddy was not being too prosaic. From a word or two she caught she knew he was talking politics. But Miss Holmes did not look bored. Perhaps she was interested in politics too.

"Why do you call her Nirvana?" Mrs. Bablove asked, dropping her voice a little. But the couple at the further end of the table were absorbed in their talk now and taking no notice of what the others were saying.

"Why do I call her Nirvana? Because she looks like a gipsy. She does, doesn't she?"

Mr. Carver's fruity voice had also become discreet.

"I don't know. I think she looks charming."

"Do you?" said Mr. Carver. "I'd like to talk to you about that. Not now—presently." He knew the value of a slight hint

of mystery. "Have a cigarette now, Mrs. Bablove?"

"Thanks. I think I will."

"Why wouldn't you smoke before?" he asked as he lit the cigarette for her.

"Too many people. The room's nearly empty now. I'm not so brave as—Nirvana."

"I don't think you quite know what you are. You're full of possibilities."

"I like these cigarettes," said Dora. "Teddy gives me one sometimes, though I don't often smoke, but his are not quite so nice as these."

Mr. Carver became informative on the subject of Turkish tobacco, but with the information he wove much which was personal. It appeared that it was Mr. Carver's ambition to leave business and London and to spend the rest of his life in Japan.

"I thought you were devoted to London," said Mrs. Bablove. "What you say rather surprises me."

"I surprise myself sometimes," said Mr. Carver darkly.

A little later all rose to go.

A hansom was waiting just outside, and Mr. Carver began to organize briskly.

"Will you take Miss Holmes in that cab, Teddy? It's scarcely two minutes out of your way. I'll bring Mrs. Bablove in the next cab."

Mr. Carver took it all for granted, and it was done as he suggested. The next cab was a taxi.

"We shall be home before them," laughed Dora as she got into the cab. "By the way, Mr. Carver, what were you going to tell me about Nirvana?"

And presently Mr. Carver was saying why Miss Holmes could not seem charming when Dora Bablove was present. He compared them in some detail. "I don't think you know enough about yourself," he said. "That delicious mouth of yours!"

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When they reached Mrs. Bablove's house Dora did not ask Mr. Carver to come in. She thanked him and said good night rather briefly. She switched on the light in the hall, ran upstairs to see that her two little boys were safely asleep, and came down to the dining-room to wait for her husband.

She poured out a glass of water and drank it. Then she sat quite still in the easy-chair with her head in her hands. What was she to do? What on earth was she to do? A man had kissed her on the lips—a man who was not her husband. She had let him do it. She thought—she hardly knew—that her lips had answered to his. Such a thing had never happened to her before. She was wide awake now. But surely in the cab she must have been half asleep.

She had leaned back with her eyes half-closed, suffused with a pleasant warmth and tiredness, and had heard his caressing voice praising her as she had never before been

praised. She had not guessed that he thought so much of her—that he admired her so much. Then as he spoke of the beauty of her hands he took one of her hands in his. She knew what would come and was without any power to prevent it. She had seen his face come near to her own and—no she would tell the truth to herself. For a moment she had gone mad and let herself go completely. She had wanted to be kissed, and as she felt his lips upon her own her kiss had met his.

True the next moment she had recovered herself; she chatted gaily, was merely amused when Mr. Carver would have been sentimental, and would not let him get near her. Her one reference to what had happened was as the cab neared her own door. She said, “You know what you did when I had fallen asleep. Never try to do it again. And never speak of it to me. I couldn’t forgive it twice, you know. To-night I’ve—I made some allowance for—well, here we are. I must get out.”

She was not troubled about Mr. Carver. She had told him that she was asleep, and had implied that he was under the influence of wine. She felt that she could always manage Mr. Carver.

But what about Teddy? He must never, never know. It was one little slip, one moment of madness, and it would never happen again. It would be wicked to let Teddy know and to make him wretched.

On the other hand, if she did not tell him,

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how was she to quiet the voice of conscience ? What became of their mutual confidence ? She felt that she could never be happy again until she had told all and been forgiven.

She took the thing tragically. She saw the whole of her own happiness and Teddy's happiness ruined by that one moment of madness and the future of the little boys seriously imperilled. She was just wondering who, in the event of a separation, would have the custody of the children, when she heard the sound of Teddy's hansom as it stopped at the door.

What on earth was she to do ? She could never face him. She would just burst into tears and tell him everything.

But she found herself quite unable to carry out this decision. Teddy looked so cheerful. He talked more than usual. How had she liked it ? A rare good dinner, it seemed to him. And she had been by far the prettiest woman there. He had felt proud of her.

She smiled sadly, and said that he was prejudiced. "And how did you get on with Miss Holmes ?"

"Oh, all right. The trouble with her is that she's rather affected, and affectation is just one of those things that I can't stand."

If only for one moment he would take his eyes off her. She felt distraught. She hardly knew what she was saying. She observed that sparkling Burgundy seemed rather a heady wine. He hastened to agree with her.

"I didn't take much of it. To tell the

truth, it's not a wine I ever met before, and the taste seemed to me rather funny. I'd sooner have a whisky-and-soda any day."

"Have one now. Do. Why not? I'll run up to bed because I'm so tired. I dare say I shall be asleep by the time you come."

"Oh, I shan't be long," said Teddy, and Dora managed to get out of the room without being kissed.

The moment she had gone Teddy's cheerfulness vanished. He mixed himself a very stiff whisky-and-soda, and sipped gloomily, staring at the dead cigarette between his fingers.

Dora panted as she undressed. Tragedy seemed to be choking her. She hurried into bed. When Teddy came up she pretended to be asleep, but she got little sleep that night.

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Two days had passed and Dora had not spoken. There were dark lines under her eyes, and she seldom smiled. Teddy, always kind, had been kinder to her than ever. He said complimentary things to her. Every evening he brought her fruit from the city, because she liked fruit; it was expensive fruit too. And every kind word or act seemed to cut her heart like a knife. She felt so unworthy of devotion. The position was unendurable, and on the third morning as they rose from breakfast she suddenly determined to end it there and then—to tell him everything and throw herself on his mercy.

"I want to speak to you for a minute before

you go to the city," she said. "Will you come into the drawing-room?"

"Very well," said Teddy.

In the drawing-room she found that she was shaking all over and had to sit down. She was thinking how she would begin, when she heard a hollow voice say, "Wait. You need say nothing." It was Teddy's voice.

"What do you mean?" she asked in a choked whisper.

"Do you think I haven't seen?" said Teddy, almost fiercely. "You guessed it somehow when I came into the house that night. I suppose a bad conscience gives itself away. I thought you knew when you asked me how I got on with Miss Holmes. These last two days you've been upset. You've not been yourself. And that of course made me certain you knew. Only let me tell you how I came to do it."

"Yes," said Dora, with great self-possession, "tell me that."

"Well, she was talking about the loneliness of her life. It was as much pity as anything. And the cab was going down a dark street at the time. Mind, I only kissed her once. And the moment I did it I—I was ashamed of myself. You don't know what I've been through."

Dora thought she did, but she said nothing.

"I swear that I care for no woman in the world but you, Dora. I'm awfully sorry I've hurt you like this. Can you ever forgive me?"

Dora rose, and placed both hands on his shoulders. "Could you have forgiven me," she said, "if I had let a man kiss me?"

He paused a moment. "Yes, Dora," he said, "I think so."

Her face was like the face of an angel. "Then, Teddy dear, I forgive you absolutely. We will never speak of this again. And it will never happen again, will it?"

"Never," said the repentant sinner, and kissed her.

Mrs. Bablove sang happily as she helped to make the beds that morning.

And they never did speak of it again. Once, two years later—this was after poor Aunt Mary had been called to her rest and the Babloves had become prosperous in consequence—Teddy gave it as his opinion that there was only one sparkling wine worth consideration and that wine was champagne. Dora cordially agreed with him, but changed the subject rapidly.

TOO SOON AND TOO LATE

THE waiter placed before young Mr. Haynes a plate on which were a few white bones, an eyeball, and a piece of black mackintosh.

"Turbot, sir," said the waiter, in an explanatory voice.

It was a hotel dinner in an English cathedral city, and faithful to its type. The green venetian blinds were drawn down, and the incandescent gas was shaded with pink paper. The walls were covered with a material that is supposed to simulate Jacobean oak panelling ; it may be acquitted of any actual deceit.

The room was full, and at the small tables were many of those middle-aged or aged women that seem to haunt the provincial hotels of this country. They are a class by themselves. They wear brown skirts and a totally different blouse in the evening, and grandmamma has a grey woollen shawl. They speak in whispers and peck patiently any odds and ends that the waiter gives them. They have an air of defective vitality and chronic discontent. They nearly all suffer from catarrh and use eucalyptus on their handkerchiefs. Observe, too, their surreptitiousness. When the elderly lady, hand to mouth and eyes glazed with terror, has given the waiter an order, so hushed as to be

almost inaudible, and then proceeds to build up a screen at her right hand with the wine-list and cruet-stand, you may be pretty certain that there will presently be a little weak whisky-and-soda on the far side of the entanglement.

There were two waiters in the room. The elder of them was English, had been there for years, and under the favourable influence of a cathedral atmosphere had already grown much of the manner and appearance of an archdeacon. The younger, a sad-eyed Italian of eighteen, had only been at the hotel two months, but he looked every inch an acolyte.

It was the archdeacon who had placed that plate of alleged turbot before young Maurice Haynes.

"Turbot, is it?" said Mr. Haynes. "Interesting relic. Now take it back to the cat again, and bring me something to eat."

Suddenly from the little table next to him came a wild burst of laughter. It broke out like a discharge of steam from a locomotive. It bubbled with pure joy. It stopped abruptly and then started again uncontrollably. It broke up all the holy calm of that *table d'hôte*. Withered virgins of fifty turned round to look at this laughing girl, some with a sniff of disapproval, others compelled to a wan, responsive smile. The archdeacon-waiter seemed pained. The acolyte was proceeding with his work with apparent calm, when suddenly the laughter-infection smote him full in the midriff. He dropped a helping of cabinet pudding, put a hand over his mouth, bolted into the passage,

slapped his leg, exploded, and was asked what the devil he thought he was doing. In the dining-room the girl still laughed at intervals.

"Gontrol yourself, I beg," said her flustered German governess. "It is hysteria. Hosh! hosh! Ruhig! Celia! It is so rude."

Celia shook her head.

"Can't help it, Fräulein," she gasped. "Anything about a cat makes me laugh."

And she relapsed again.

Maurice Haynes had not had the faintest intention of being amusing. It was out of the bitterness of his soul that he had spoken. He had already declined to believe that over-diluted meat-extract with some armorial bearings in stamped carrot constituted *Julienne* soup. This supposed turbot was more than he could endure. He was an artist, eupeptic and creative, and he had been travelling all day; on the morrow he was to begin the presentation portrait of a scholarly canon with a fine head; now, if ever, dinner was a positive necessity. He sent for the manageress.

The manageress was all black satin and superciliousness when she arrived, but only the black satin was left by the time Haynes had finished with her. He was under the impression that he was being merely firm; but it seems to me that when you tell the manageress of the principal hotel in a cathedral city that she is not fit to cater for a troop of performing fleas, you go beyond firmness.

At any rate, he was effectual. He received immediately more turbot than had ever been

given to one man at one time since the foundation of the hotel. His helping from the joint was such that he was almost (but not quite) ashamed to demand a second. And the *omelette aux fines herbes*, which came as a peace-offering at the end of the repast, was exclusive matter for M. Haynes, Esq., only, and not in the contract.

His sunny temper returned. He consulted affably with the head waiter on the grave question of port. And now, for the first time, he turned his head to see who the cheeky kid was who had laughed at his righteous indignation.

He saw a tall girl of fifteen with an elderly governess. The governess was peeling walnuts, and the girl was eating them; this seemed to argue devotion on the part of the governess. The girl had an Irish beauty of dark hair and blue eyes, and her face followed her every thought with marvellous expressiveness. The mouth was sweet and sensitive. Haynes thought she had lovely colour, but would be the devil to paint. One lightning glance showed her that he was looking at her; she flushed slightly, knowing that she had been really too awful, but she also smiled, because she remembered the cat.

“Nice kid,” thought Haynes.

When she had gone, the effect was much as if the incandescent gas had been lowered. There was no longer any young vitality in the room, nothing but a few groups of elderly grey women over their walnuts—pecking, cracking, mumbling, sniffing.

“Waiter,” said Haynes to the acolyte, “take my port into the smoking-room.”

The smoking-room was equally depressing. It seemed to be furnished principally with spittoons and advertisements of auction sales, and an aged smell of bad beer hovered over it. Haynes endured it for the length of two cigarettes, and then his eye caught, framed on the wall, that successful Christmas-number plate, “Won’t ’Oo Kiss Doggie ?” Haynes groaned and fled.

The room he next tried was the drawing-room, and to prevent any possibility of mistake its name had been painted on the door. Here the furniture was more ambitious, and a long-tailed piano stood open. The room was empty, and only one gas jet had been lit. Haynes ran one hand over the key board, and was surprised to find that the instrument was in tune. He sat down, and began modulating idly from one key into another, as his thoughts wandered. Presently he began to play a waltz of Chopin’s, all passion and incense. He did not hear the door open and close. It was only as he played the last notes that he found he now had an audience.

There were two old ladies with their knitting. There was a German governess engaged on a beadwork cover for a spectacle case. And there was Celia, quite serious now, and with excited eyes, coming straight towards him.

“It was too lovely,” she cried. “I wish you could have gone on for ever.” She held out her hand to him. “Thank you, thank you !”

Now, more than ever, did consternation fall upon Fräulein. She lived in a perpetual state of terror as to what Celia would do next, and Celia always did it. She was full now of incoherent reproof to Celia and apologies to Haynes. "She is zo imbolsive."

Haynes rose from the piano laughing. "*Ach seien Sie ihr nicht böse,*" he said. "*Es freut mich ja, dass sie meine dumme Musik gerne hört.*"

If he had really told her in English not to mind, and that he was glad his silly music had pleased them, he would have made much less impression. In the eyes of Fräulein, the fact that he spoke her native tongue consecrated him; and Celia sat up till nearly eleven that night, and went to bed filled with music and adoration.

Next morning Haynes was precisely an hour late for his appointment with the scholarly canon with the fine head. His story in excuse about a missing tube of colour was plausible and fairly amusing, but had no foundation in fact. He had spent that hour in making two rapid drawings of Celia—effective things in sanguine on grey paper. And then Celia and her governess had departed in continuance of a holiday tour to places of historical and educational interest.

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At the end of ten years, on a late afternoon in June, Maurice Haynes came back to that hotel again. London had become suddenly intolerable to him. He was tired of his work, and he

was still more tired of his play, if the wearying social functions that befall the fashionable portrait-painter are to be called play. He wanted to fly away and be at rest. If he had not the wings of a dove, he had, at any rate, a good motor-car, and he drove it himself. He had no particular destination in view when he started; he had driven a hundred miles before he decided that he might as well stop at the old cathedral city that night.

He found little change at the hotel. The same black satin manageress still extended turbots beyond their natural limit; but the archidiaconal waiter had increased in girth and in stateliness of movement, and had a new acolyte—the sad-eyed Italian had given place to a straw-coloured German.

Maurice Haynes dined well, having taken precautionary measures to that end. As soon as he had recalled himself to the memory of the manageress, she had recognized that this was not an occasion for trifling. But it seemed that other visitors were not being so well treated. From a little table behind him Haynes heard much grumbling in a querulous man's voice. "Food not fit for a cat," was one phrase he caught. A woman answered briefly, in a low and gentle voice, and Haynes, without hearing what she said, was conscious that she was being bored intolerably.

Haynes looked round.

The woman sat with her back to Haynes. She wore a black lace tea-gown, and leaned back in her chair. The man opposite to her

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was about fifty years of age, and of unprepossessing appearance. He had that thing which is hardly ever seen, except on the stage—a red nose. He had also a mean mouth, and a most abominable and Shakespearean expanse of forehead.

It was only as these two people passed out of the room that Haynes caught a glimpse of the woman's face, and recognized that this was Celia. This was the laughing girl that he had met ten years before. The man was evidently her husband. She was very beautiful, as she had promised to be, but the expression on her face was very sad. It is a long way from fifteen to twenty-five, and many changes befall in that decade.

It was to him something more than an impressive coincidence. Suddenly this highly successful artist saw his life as a failure. He was convinced that he should have married Celia, and he was convinced that they would have been happy. But the first time he had met her, ten years before, she had been too young for love. He had found her beauty adorable, and had liked her immensely as a child, but until this moment she had remained in his memory as a sketch in sanguine on grey paper—nothing else. He had shown no prescience. He had not guessed at the fruition of the unborn summers.

For an evening and a morning he had seen her, and then had allowed the clue of her life to slip out of his hands. And now chance mocked him once more with the sight of her—

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now that she was married to that miserable little man with the red nose and plaintive voice, now that she was unhappy, now that it was too late.

Yet, though it was too late, he now went into the drawing-room and began to play the same music that he had played ten years before. He felt certain that if she heard it it would bring her to him. He was not mistaken.

She paused for a moment in the open doorway, and then came towards him, smiling and self-possessed.

"I did not know you were staying in the hotel," she said, and then added quickly: "You do remember me, don't you?"

"Yes, Celia," he said as he shook hands with her. "I remember you very well. I caught a glimpse of you as you were going out of the dining-room, I recognized you at once. I was wondering if you would remember this." His hands on the piano repeated a phrase of the music.

"Of course I remember it. But I am not Celia any more. I am Mrs. Owen."

"Oh, no," said Haynes, laughing. "When one has called the child by her Christian name, one calls the woman by her Christian name. I shall certainly call you Celia."

"You can if you like."

"Now tell me all about it."

"All about what?"

"All about the last ten years of your life."

"What is there to tell? I have done nothing. I was married when I was eighteen.

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Since then I have gone on existing. Now you, on the contrary, have had a splendid——”

“Have you got any children, Celia?” he asked suddenly.

She shook her head. “Perhaps it is as well,” she said drearily. “I don’t think my husband would like children. He is an archæologist, you know. That is why we are here. He is making rubbings of brasses in the cathedral. He has a great collection of them, all beautifully catalogued.”

“How perfectly horrible,” said Haynes with conviction.

For the first time she laughed.

“So you still laugh sometimes,” he said.

“Not very often now. But I remember what you mean. I believe I behaved abominably. I overheard something you said about a cat. It was your own private joke, and I did not know you, and had no right to laugh at it. I don’t know why, but jokes about cats specially appealed to me then. Now I don’t think cats are any more amusing than anything else, do you?”

“Yes—no—I don’t know. Are you happy, Celia?”

“I knew you were going to ask that.”

“Well, are you?”

“Oh, of course I am. Perfectly.”

And by way of proving it she added, with a sob in her voice, that she must go, that Harry would wonder where she was. He let her go.

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TOO SOON AND LOO LATE

At breakfast next morning Mr. Maurice Haynes very deliberately introduced himself to Mr. Henry Owen. Celia was not yet down.

Mr. Owen was pleased to be very gracious. He said that Celia had told him about Mr. Haynes, and that it was a pleasure to meet so distinguished an artist. "You gave my wife a little sketch you made of her when she was a girl, I think?"

"I did."

"Well, I did a silly thing about that. It was soon after our marriage. A friend of mine came along and offered me a fiver for it, and I took it."

"I see. And your wife didn't like it?"

"Oh, she was angry enough; but that's not what I mean. If I had only known then that you were the coming man, I would never have sold that sketch for a fiver. What would it be worth now?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Haynes; "it would depend upon how much anyone wanted it."

In the course of conversation Haynes learned a good deal about Mr. Owen, who was a gentleman without reticence. He explained, for instance, that the redness of his nose was due entirely to dyspepsia, and not to intemperance. He was rather pathetic about it, posing as one misunderstood by the world. He entered into the question of dyspepsia generally, with more detail than seemed to Haynes to be absolutely requisite. Haynes changed the subject.

"I wonder if you would care to come out on my car this morning?" he said—"you and

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Mrs. Owen, of course. It's rather a jolly morning, and I've got nothing to do. I would be glad to drive you anywhere."

"Not for me, thanks. I have my work to do at the cathedral. Take my wife for a drive, by all means."

"Thanks, I will. She will be down directly?"

"Yes; I'll send her to you. She has got the bad habit of keeping awake all night, and sleeping in the morning. A great mistake. I'm always telling her about it."

An hour later Haynes, with Celia by his side, drove out from the cathedral city.

"Where shall we go to?" he asked.

"To the world's end," she said fantastically, laughing. She was in strangely high spirits this morning.

A mile further on he stopped the car and got down to pick her the wild roses that she wanted. As he gave them to her, he said in a low voice: "What is the good of pretending any more? You know perfectly well that I love you."

"Yes."

"You love me, too?" She bowed her head. "Then you are not going back to him? You will come with me?"

"To the world's end," she whispered.

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It was quite late that afternoon when she suddenly and irrevocably changed her mind. "I must go back," she said. "This is all very beautiful, but it is like my wild roses—it falls to pieces. There is no romance left. The sordid legal business always ends it. Besides,

TOO SOON AND TOO LATE

it is stolen happiness. I must not have it. I have had a day of life, and I can go on living for a while on the memory of it. You come to me too late, Maurice."

It was in vain that he pleaded with her. She admitted that she did not know whether it was conscience or cowardice, but she was none the less resolved. An hour later they were back at the hotel again.

At Mr. Owen's suggestion, Maurice dined at their table that night. Mr. Owen had secured a valuable addition to his collection, and was feeling pleased with himself and with the world. He rallied his wife cheerfully on her want of appetite, and said that her run in the car did not seem to have done her much good.

"That's it," he continued. "She has no appetite, but has a perfect digestion. I have a magnificent appetite, but I always have to pay for it afterwards. Seems ironical, doesn't it?"

And suddenly Celia burst into uncontrollable, almost hysterical, and quite mirthless laughter. That laugh haunted Haynes at times for the rest of his life.

THE NIGHT OF GLORY

It was half-past six at night when she came down from the workrooms and out into the street. She was an intensely anæmic girl, neatly dressed, thin, tired. Given better health, she would not have been unattractive ; given a better way of life, she would have had better health.

A gentleman of forty-five crossed the street towards her, raised his hat, and said, " You're late to-night."

She took absolutely no notice, and slightly quickened in her pace.

" Please do not hurry," he said. " I have so much to say to you." Then she turned round on him and was very furious. If he bothered her any more she would hand him over to the police.

" Pray don't misunderstand me," said the gentleman, plaintively ; " I would not insult you or treat you with anything but the greatest respect on any account."

" Then what on earth do you want ? " she said rather irritably.

" I will put it as briefly as I can. I happen to be very wealthy. I can enjoy nothing—the day for that has gone past for me. I wish for one night to see somebody else enjoy something,

It had to be somebody who did not usually spend money freely ; somebody who worked hard ; somebody who had refinement and education. I thought, and I still think, that I have found all these things in you. Will you come with me ? Dinner, a theatre or a music-hall, a little supper at the Carlton, and then my brougham shall drive you home. You will be rendering me the greatest possible service."

She was a girl that was quite used to taking care of herself. If she had not much confidence in him, she had great confidence in herself. She could, at any rate, test it, and abandon the experiment when it pleased her.

"But," she said, "I have no proper dress for that kind of thing."

"You know what the proper dress would be ?"

"Of course I do. It's my business."

"Very well, then, the rest is simple. You will go immediately and get all that you require in that way—dress, gloves, everything. Do not think about money, merely exercise the excellent taste which you show in your present costume. If the dress gives you the least pleasure, I know that it will give me much more. I shall be your debtor."

"It is like a fairy tale," she said.

"My brougham is here, and at your service." The electric brougham slid noiselessly up to them. They got in.

In the brougham she watched him nervously, sideways. Yes, he was forty-five. His dark

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hair was grey on the temples ; there was a melancholy cruelty in his thin-lipped mouth ; but the greenish eyes, strong and searching, were not the eyes of one who had out-lived himself.

“I can’t understand,” she said. “What do you mean ? You can’t enjoy anything ? ”

“Almost that. I am, unfortunately, one who must have novelty. There are many women to whom I have given pretty toys and suppers at the Carlton. That—well, that was another affair. This is quite different. To-night I give for no other motive than to bring enjoyment to you. You see ? I shall enjoy it second-hand. Tell me all about the dress.”

She laughed. “Oh ! you wouldn’t understand if I did. I am going to Lambert’s. One of the ladies there is a great friend of mine. Lucky that I am stock size, isn’t it ? ”

“Very,” said the man, with enthusiasm. He had not the faintest notion what stock size meant.

When the brougham stopped at Lambert’s she seemed a little troubled. “Half an hour is the least time I can possibly be,” she said. “You won’t like waiting.”

“Like it ? It will be a luxury to me. Nobody has dared to make me wait for twenty years. You shall do it. Your foot is on my neck. Seriously, I have one or two little things to do myself. In the meantime”—he handed her a roll of notes—“get everything you want and pay for it.”

She was fully three-quarters of an hour away,

but she was a very transfigured maiden when the commissionaire opened the door of the brougham for her. Excitement, or a touch of rouge, had put a little colour into her pale face. Her dark hair was beautiful, and becomingly dressed. For the rest, all was perfect, from that shapely head down to the white satin shoes.

“Will this do?” she said eagerly.

“It is superb. You are transformed.”

“That’s quite true,” she said. “I don’t seem to myself to be the same kind of person. I don’t think the same way. Oh! please, it didn’t take nearly all that money. Look, I have got it here somewhere.” She fumbled under her cloak.

“Oh! please don’t bother,” said her companion. “You may want it later for something or other. See what I have been doing to fill in time.

He took from its box an old ivory fan exquisitely painted, and handed it to her.

“That fan,” he said, “belonged once to a princess, a daughter of George the Third. She was his favourite daughter, and it was her death which finally dethroned his reason. Take it; you also are a princess to-night.”

“I cannot thank you—I cannot even begin to thank you. It is like a most heavenly dream coming true.”

“Pray don’t speak of thanks. It is I who am indebted to you for being pleased. I have bought another little toy for you as well.”

He opened a case, containing a necklace of

THE NIGHT OF GLORY

pearls, a single row. Not of great size, but well matched and graduated.

"I am afraid" he said, "that this has no romantic history. The best I can imagine is that the diver who brought the pearls was snapped in two by a shark."

"The best?" she cried. "That is the worst! That is horrible! Oh! but what a lovely necklace!"

"Then," said the man, "he was not snapped in two by a shark. He amassed great wealth in the pearl fishery business, retired from it, married a wife, had seventeen children, and was very, very happy."

"Seventeen seems a lot," said the girl.

"To-night you have only to command. The poor man had but two. May I put the necklace on for you?"

She hesitated. After all, why be a fool?

"Of course, if you like," she said.

He fastened the snap quickly and deftly.

"That is the way pearls look best," he said.

She rubbed her eyes.

"Oh! don't do that," said the man.

She laughed. "I was trying to wake up," she said.

"Don't wake up. But as we now know one another so well shall we say what our names are?"

"Well, your lordship," said the girl, a little timidly, "my name is Appleby—Marion Appleby."

"Not 'your lordship'; Lord Alcester, please."

Presently she had recovered from the shock of the introduction, and was eating iced Cantaloup melon. She looked pleased with the world. She tasted everything, and drank a very little champagne.

His lordship dined principally on dry toast and old brandy. He was evidently well known and appreciated in the restaurant.

"Tell me all about yourself," he said to her. "What is your ordinary day like?"

"That is what I'd like to forget just now," she said. "We live in Fulham, and it's a big family. Father's a very highly-educated man and speaks three languages. He is a clerk in a very good position; but still, you see, there are so many of us, and mamma's health isn't good. I am up early every morning seeing to the children, and there is my own work all day, and those workrooms are awful in the summer; then there is the walk back, or sometimes a bus if I am very tired, and after that there is always something to do about the house before I go to bed."

"Any holidays?"

"Oh! yes. We have our fortnight at the sea every summer. Father says that is not a luxury but a necessity, and he'd save in almost any way sooner than give that up. I believe he's right, too; you'd hardly know me after a fortnight at Margate, if the weather's been good. I get tanned, but I don't freckle. That's luck, isn't it?"

"It is the luckiest thing in the world. Waiter, I want a box at the Frivolity to-night;

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see about it, please. If there is no box to be had I will not take stalls, I will go somewhere else. And, Miss Appleby, what do you suppose a day of my life is like ? ”

“ I haven’t the least idea.”

“ It is far harder work than yours, and much duller. Believe me, my child, there is no toil so hard or so absolutely uninteresting as the toil that one goes through in order to enjoy one’s self. In August, when I go North for the shooting, I still enjoy a little pleasure—at any rate, the life there is not too actively disgusting. But the London season—and I would far sooner die than miss any London season—is, if I may use the expression, unmitigated hell.”

“ I think,” the girl said, “ that I could be happy if I were you.”

“ Undoubtedly—for six months ; not always. This is really the only pleasant evening that I have spent this summer.”

“ What made you think of it ? Why did you choose me ? ”

“ An all-merciful Providence that did not desire that I should slit my throat out of sheer boredom made me think of it. I waited, and I saw the rest of your companions pass out from the shop. Not one of them would have suited me. Frankly, they are all a little vulgar, and, which is far worse, a little uninteresting. You, on the other hand, are quite charming. You possess a fascination peculiar to yourself.”

“ What is it ? ” the girl asked breathlessly.

“ You are very good, and you have a potentiality of being very bad. If you had

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been very bad, with a potentiality of being very good, you would also have fascinated me. I like potentiality in others, for there is none in myself. I shall never be any better and I could not be any worse, and I don't care two straws either way. Let's talk about something more interesting than myself. What? Oh! the box at the Frivolity. Very well, shall we go, my child, or would you like to change your mind and go to something else?"

It was quite late that night when he put her carefully into his brougham, shook hands with her, refused to hear a word of thanks, and gave the coachman the address in Fulham to which he was to take her.

* * * *

Five years had done a good deal. They had nearly, but not quite, killed Lord Alcester. This winter night, bent, wizened, wrapped in furs, and leaning heavily on his stick, he crawled slowly along Piccadilly on his way from one club to another.

An ungloved hand touched his arm, and a hoarse woman's voice said, "Half a moment, my lord."

He gave her one quick glance from under his heavy eyebrows. Those eyes were not dead yet.

"It won't do," said Lord Alcester.

The girl laughed bitterly. "I thought you might like to look at your work," she said. "You were the ruin of me five years ago."

"My good woman," said Lord Alcester. "If I stopped in Piccadilly to talk to all the women

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who think I have been the ruin of them, it would stop the traffic. Let me go, please."

She still clung to his arm. "Just half a moment," she said. "The work girl whom you gave a pretty dress to, and a string of pearls, and a fan that once belonged to a princess. You remember?"

"Good God!" said Lord Alcester. "Where can we talk?"

She laughed again, the same bitter laugh, and surveyed her reflection in a shop-window.

"Yes," she said, "a box at the Frivolity wouldn't do for me now, would it? Here, I know of a place, if you'll follow me."

"All right," said Lord Alcester. "Walk slowly."

She led him by side-streets into back-streets. The little public-house was very quiet, discreet, sinful and unsavoury. She pushed her way through to a little room behind the bar.

"Now then," she said.

With difficulty Lord Alcester dragged off his heavy fur coat and flung himself down on the crimson velvet.

"What a godless hole this is," he said.

"What are you going to have?"

"Glass of port," she said promptly.

"You haven't taken to spirits yet?"

"I keep that for the mornings. Shall I ring the bell?"

He nodded. The waiter who entered looked curiously from one to another. Lord Alcester had a firm, quiet, impressive manner.

"You will bring me," he said, "a bottle of

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the best port you have and a small bottle of soda-water. Make up that fire."

"I never said a bottle," said the woman. "Are you going to drink the rest?"

"I am going to drink the soda-water. Don't talk about that. Sit down by the fire. Warm your hands and tell me about yourself."

It was not until she had finished her first glass of port that she began on the subject. "There is no more to say than what I said before," she said. "You were my ruin."

"I remember that night very distinctly. I never made love to you. I never tried to kiss you. I never treated you with any less respect than I would have treated a woman of my own class. What are you talking about? What is all this nonsense?"

"No nonsense at all. How did you think it would be when I got home that night with fifty pounds' worth of new clothes, and my pearl necklace, and a story of a theatre and supper afterwards? Do you think they would believe my word at home? They said they did; I have got a temper, and they daren't say anything else; but they let me see very well that they didn't believe me. I wasn't going to stand it. Next morning at breakfast, when they were all full of the thing, I gave them some straight talking, and then I cleared out."

"Am I responsible for the heat of your temper and the straightness of your talking?"

"You might have guessed how it would be with me. Did you think that after one night of glory like that I was going back to perpetual

THE NIGHT OF GLORY

drudgery ? I'd seen life as it might be, and I'd been given a bad name. I'd only got to deserve it."

"How much did you get for the pearl necklace ?"

"Three hundred and fifty."

"Then you were swindled."

"I know that, of course. I told them so. What did it matter ? It was all gone in a few weeks. I can tell you I made *money* fly in those days. That's all past. I've lost what little good looks I ever had, haven't I ?"

"Quite," said Lord Alcester, mercilessly. "You drink, you see," he added.

The girl put down her glass and fumbled desperately for a dirty little handkerchief with her face screwed awry. She dabbed at her eyes and shook with sobs.

"Stop that," said Lord Alcester. "You are making the devil of a row. Look here, come to business."

"I might have been good," she moaned. "If I had never met you I might have been good."

Lord Alcester was writing something on one of his visiting-cards. He stepped over to her and touched her on the shoulder. "Can you read that address ?" he said.

"Yes," she said between her sobs. "Lincoln's Inn Fields. Solicitors, I suppose."

"Quite so," said Lord Alcester, as he struggled back into his coat again. "They'll give you a pound a week as long as you live. Call for it on Saturday mornings. I could also

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give you plenty of good advice, but I won't. Are you coming ? ”

She glanced at the decanter by her side. “Not quite yet,” she said. “I think I'll just——”

“Oh ! I see,” said Lord Alcester, contemptuously. “Good-night, then.”

Out in the street he stopped the first hansom that he saw. The man had often driven him before.

“What will you take,” he said to the man, “to drive this cab to eternal smash ? Drive it, for instance, down the Duke of York's steps ? ”

The cabman smiled patiently. “Which club did you say, my lord ? ” Lord Alcester gave the address of his club and got into the cab.

THE MOON-SLAVE

THE Princess Viola had, even in her childhood, an inevitable submission to the dance; a rhythmical madness in her blood answered hotly to the dance music, swaying her, as the wind sways trees, to movements of perfect sympathy and grace.

For the rest, she had her beauty and her long hair, that reached to her knees, and was thought lovable; but she was never very fervent and vivid unless she was dancing; at other times there almost seemed to be a touch of lethargy upon her. Now, when she was sixteen years old, she was betrothed to the Prince Hugo. With others the betrothal was merely a question of state. With her it was merely a question of obedience to the wishes of authority; it had been arranged; Hugo was *comme ci, comme ça*—no god in her eyes; it did not matter. But with Hugo it was quite different—he loved her.

The betrothal was celebrated by a banquet, and afterwards by a dance in the great hall of the palace. From this dance the Princess soon made her escape, quite discontented, and went to the furthest part of the palace gardens, where she could no longer hear the music calling her.

COLLECTED TALES

“They are all right,” she said to herself as she thought of the men she had left, “but they cannot dance. Mechanically they are all right; they have learned it and don’t make childish mistakes; but they are only one-two-three machines. They haven’t the inspiration of dancing. It is so different when I dance alone.”

She wandered on until she reached an old forsaken maze. It had been planned by a former king. All round it was a high crumbling wall with foxgloves growing on it. The maze itself had all its paths bordered with high opaque hedges; in the very centre was a circular open space with tall pine-trees growing round it. Many years ago the clue to the maze had been lost; it was but rarely now that anyone entered it. Its gravel paths were green with weeds, and in some places the hedges, spreading beyond their borders, had made the way almost impassable.

For a moment or two Viola stood peering in at the gate—a narrow gate with curiously twisted bars of wrought iron surmounted by a heraldic device. Then the whim seized her to enter the maze and try to find the space in the centre. She opened the gate and went in.

Outside everything was uncannily visible in the light of the full moon, but here in the dark shaded alleys the night was conscious of itself. She soon forgot her purpose, and wandered about quite aimlessly, sometimes forcing her way where the brambles had flung a laced barrier across her path, and a dragging mass of

THE MOON-SLAVE

convolvulus struck wet and cool upon her cheek. As chance would have it she suddenly found herself standing under the tall pines, and looking at the open space that formed the goal of the maze. She was pleased that she had got there. Here the ground was carpeted with sand, fine and, as it seemed, beaten hard. From the summer night sky immediately above, the moonlight, unobstructed here, streamed straight down upon the scene.

Viola began to think about dancing. Over the dry, smooth sand her little satin shoes moved easily, stepping and gliding, circling and stepping, as she hummed the tune to which they moved. In the centre of the space she paused, looked at the wall of dark trees all round, at the shining stretches of silvery sand and at the moon above.

“My beautiful, moonlit, lonely, old dancing-room, why did I never find you before?” she cried; “but,” she added, “you need music—there must be music here.”

In her fantastic mood she stretched her soft, clasped hands upwards towards the moon.

“Sweet moon,” she said in a kind of mock prayer, “make your white light come down in music into my dancing-room here, and I will dance most deliciously for you to see.” She flung her head backward and let her hands fall; her eyes were half closed, and her mouth was a kissing mouth. “Ah! sweet moon,” she whispered, “do this for me, and I will be your slave; I will be what you will.”

Quite suddenly the air was filled with the

sound of a grand invisible orchestra. Viola did not stop to wonder. To the music of a slow saraband she swayed and postured. In the music there was the regular beat of small drums and a perpetual drone. The air seemed to be filled with the perfume of some bitter spice. Viola could fancy almost that she saw a smouldering camp-fire and heard far off the roar of some desolate wild beast. She let her long hair fall, raising the heavy strands of it in either hand as she moved slowly to the laden music. Slowly her body swayed with drowsy grace, slowly her satin shoes slid over the silver sand.

The music ceased with a clash of cymbals. Viola rubbed her eyes. She fastened her hair up carefully again. Suddenly she looked up, almost imperiously.

“Music! more music!” she cried.

Once more the music came. This time it was a dance of caprice, pelting along over the violin strings, leaping, laughing, wanton. Again an illusion seemed to cross her eyes. An old king was watching her, a king with the sordid history of the exhaustion of pleasure written on his flaccid face. A hook-nosed courtier by his side settled the ruffles at his wrists and mumbled, “*Ravissant! Quel malheur que la vieillesse!*” It was a strange illusion. Faster and faster she sped to the music, stepping, spinning, pirouetting; the dance was light as thistle-down, fierce as fire, smooth as a rapid stream.

The moment that the music ceased Viola

THE MOON-SLAVE

became horribly afraid. She turned and fled away from the moonlit space, through the trees, down the dark alleys of the maze, not heeding in the least which turn she took, and yet she found herself soon at the outside iron gate. From thence she ran through the palace garden, hardly ever pausing to take breath, until she reached the palace itself. In the eastern sky the first signs of dawn were showing; in the palace the festivities were drawing to an end. As she stood alone in the outer hall Prince Hugo came towards her.

"Where have you been, Viola?" he said sternly. "What have you been doing?"

She stamped her little foot.

"I will not be questioned," she replied angrily.

"I have some right to question," he said.

She laughed a little.

"For the first time in my life," she said, "I have been dancing."

He turned away in hopeless silence.

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The months passed away. Slowly a great fear came over Viola, a fear that would hardly ever leave her. For every month at the full moon, whether she would or no, she found herself driven to the maze, through its mysterious walks into that strange dancing-room. And when she was there the music began once more, and once more she danced most deliciously for the moon to see. The second time that this happened she had merely

thought that it was a recurrence of her own whim, and that the music was but a trick that the imagination had chosen to repeat. The third time frightened her, and she knew that the force that sways the tides had strange power over her. The fear grew as the year fell, for each month the music went on for a longer time—each month some of the pleasure had gone from the dance. On bitter nights in winter the moon called her and she came, when the breath was vapour, and the trees that circled her dancing-room were black bare skeletons, and the frost was cruel. She dared not tell anyone, and yet it was with difficulty that she kept her secret. Somehow chance seemed to favour her, and she always found a way to return from her midnight dance to her own room without being observed. Each month the summons seemed to be more imperious and urgent. Once when she was alone on her knees before the lighted altar in the private chapel of the palace she suddenly felt that the words of the familiar Latin prayer had gone from her memory. She rose to her feet, she sobbed bitterly, but the call had come and she could not resist it. She passed out of the chapel and down the palace-gardens. How madly she danced that night !

She was to be married in the spring. She began to be more gentle with Hugo now. She had a blind hope that when they were married she might be able to tell him about it, and he might be able to protect her, for she had always known him to be fearless. She could

not love him, but she tried to be good to him. One day he mentioned to her that he had tried to find his way to the centre of the maze, and had failed. She smiled faintly. If only she could fail ! But she never did.

On the night before the wedding-day she had gone to bed and slept peacefully, thinking with her last waking moments of Hugo. Overhead the full moon came up the sky. Quite suddenly Viola was wakened with the impulse to fly to the dancing-room. It seemed to bid her hasten with breathless speed. She flung a cloak around her, slipped her naked feet into her dancing-shoes, and hurried forth. No one saw her or heard her—on the marble staircase of the palace, on down the terraces of the garden, she ran as fast as she could. A thorn-plant caught in her cloak, but she sped on, tearing it free ; a sharp stone cut through the satin of one shoe, and her foot was wounded and bleeding, but she sped on. As the pebble that is flung from the cliff must fall until it reaches the sea, as the white ghost-moth must come in from cool hedges and scented darkness to a burning death in the lamp by which you sit so late—so Viola had no choice. The moon called her. The moon drew her to that circle of hard, bright sand and the pitiless music.

It was brilliant, rapid music to-night. Viola threw off her cloak and danced. As she did so, she saw that a shadow lay over a fragment of the moon's edge. It was the night of a total eclipse. She heeded it not. The intoxication of the dance was on her. She was all in white ;

even her face was pale in the moonlight. Every movement was full of poetry and grace.

The music would not stop. She had grown deathly weary. It seemed to her that she had been dancing for hours, and the shadow had nearly covered the moon's face, so that it was almost dark. She could hardly see the trees around her. She went on dancing, stepping, spinning, pirouetting, held by the merciless music.

It stopped at last, just when the shadow had quite covered the moon's face, and all was dark. But it stopped only for a moment, and then began again. This time it was a slow, passionate waltz. It was useless to resist; she began to dance once more. As she did so she uttered a sudden shrill scream of horror, for in the dead darkness a hot hand had caught her own and whirled her round, *and she was no longer dancing alone.*

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The search for the missing Princess lasted during the whole of the following day. In the evening Prince Hugo, his face anxious and firmly set, passed in his search the iron gate of the maze, and noticed on the stones beside it the stain of a drop of blood. Within the gate was another stain. He followed this clue, which had been left by Viola's wounded foot, until he reached that open space in the centre that had served Viola for her dancing-room. It was quite empty. He noticed that the sand round the hedges was all worn down, as though

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some one had danced there, round and round, for a long time. But no separate footprint was distinguishable there. Just outside this track, however, he saw two footprints clearly defined close together : one was the print of a tiny satin shoe ; the other was the print of a large naked foot—a cloven foot.

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THE DIARY OF A GOD

DURING the week there had been several thunderstorms. It was after the last of these, on a cool Saturday evening, that he was found at the top of the hill by a shepherd. His speech was incoherent and disconnected ; he gave his name correctly, but could or would add no account of himself. He was wet through, and sat there pulling a sprig of heather to pieces. The shepherd afterwards said that he had great difficulty in persuading him to come down, and that he talked much nonsense. In the path at the foot of the hill he was recognized by some people from the farmhouse where he was lodging, and was taken back there. They had, indeed, gone out to look for him. He was subsequently removed to an asylum, and died insane a few months later.

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Two years afterwards, when the furniture of the farmhouse came to be sold by auction, there was found in a little cupboard in the bedroom which he had occupied an ordinary penny exercise-book. This was partly filled, in a beautiful and very regular handwriting, with what seems to have been something in the nature of a diary, and the following are extracts from it :

June 1st.—It is absolutely essential to be quiet. I am beginning life again, and in quite a different way, and on quite a different scale, and I cannot make the break suddenly. I must have a pause of a few weeks in between the two different lives. I saw the advertisement of the lodgings in this farmhouse in an evening paper that somebody had left at the restaurant. That was when I was trying to make the change abruptly, and I may as well make a note of what happened.

After attending the funeral (which seemed to me an act of hypocrisy, as I hardly knew the man, but it was expected of me) I came back to my Charlotte Street rooms and had tea. I slept well that night. Then next morning I went to the office at the usual hour, in my best clothes, and with a deep band still on my hat. I went to Mr. Toller's room and knocked. He said, "Come in," and after I had entered: "Can I do anything for you? What do you want?"

Then I explained to him that I wished to leave at once. He said:

"This seems sudden, after thirty years' service."

"Yes," I replied. "I have served you faithfully for thirty years, but things have changed, and I have now three hundred a year of my own. I will pay something in lieu of notice, if you like, but I cannot go on being a clerk any more. I hope, Mr. Toller, you will not think that I speak with any impertinence to yourself, or any immodesty,

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but I am really in the position of a private gentleman."

He looked at me curiously, and as he did not say anything I repeated :

"I think I am in the position of a private gentleman."

In the end he let me go, and said very politely he was sorry to lose me. I said good-bye to the other clerks, even to those who had sometimes laughed at what they imagined to be my peculiarities. I gave the better of the two office-boys a small present in money.

I went back to the Charlotte Street rooms, but there was nothing to do there. There were figures going on in my head, and my fingers seemed to be running up and down columns. I had a stupid idea that I should be in trouble if Mr. Toller were to come in and catch me like that. I went out and had a capital lunch, and then I went to the theatre. I took a stall right in the front row, and sat there all by myself. Then I had a cab to the restaurant. It was too soon for dinner, so I ordered a whisky-and-soda, and smoked a few cigarettes. The man at the table next me left the evening paper in which I saw the advertisement of these farm-house lodgings. I read the whole of the paper, but I have forgotten it all except that advertisement, and I could say it by heart now—all about bracing air and perfect quiet and the rest of it. For dinner I had a bottle of champagne. The waiter handed me a list, and asked which I would prefer. I waved the list away and said :

“Give me the best.”

He smiled. He kept on smiling all through dinner until the end ; then he looked serious. He kept getting more serious. Then he brought two other men to look at me. They spoke to me, but I did not want to talk. I think I fell asleep. I found myself in my rooms in Charlotte Street next morning, and my landlady gave me notice because, she said, I had come home beastly drunk. Then that advertisement flashed into my mind about the bracing air. I said :

“I should have given you notice in any case ; this is not a suitable place for a gentleman.”

June 3rd.—I am rather sorry that I wrote down the above. It seems so degrading. However, it was merely an act of ignorance and carelessness on my part, and, besides, I am writing solely for myself. To myself I may own freely that I made a mistake, that I was not used to the wine, and that I had not fully gauged what the effects would be. The incident is disgusting, but I simply put it behind me, and think no more about it. I pay here two pounds ten shillings a week for my two rooms and board. I take my meals, of course, by myself in the sitting-room. It would be rather cheaper if I took them with the family, but I do not care about that. After all, what is two pounds ten shillings a week ? Roughly speaking, a hundred and thirty pounds a year.

June 17th.—I have made no entry in my diary for some days. For a certain period I have had no heart for that or for anything else. I had

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told the people here that I was a private gentleman (which is strictly true), and that I was engaged in literary pursuits. By the latter I meant to imply no more than that I am fond of reading, and that it is my intention to jot down from time to time my sensations and experiences in the new life which has burst upon me. At the same time I have been greatly depressed. Why, I can hardly explain. I have been furious with myself. Sitting in my own sitting-room, with a gold-tipped cigarette between my fingers, I have been possessed (even though I recognized it as an absurdity) by a feeling that if Mr. Toller were to come in suddenly I should get up and apologize. But the thing which depressed me most was the open country. I have read, of course, those penny stories about the poor little ragged boys who never see the green leaf in their lives, and I always thought them exaggerated. So they are exaggerated: there are the Embankment Gardens with the Press Band playing; there are parks; there are Sunday-school treats. All these little ragged boys see the green leaf, and to say they do not is an exaggeration—I am afraid a wilful exaggeration. But to see the open country is quite a different thing. Yesterday was a fine day, and I was out all day in a place called Wensley Dale. On one spot where I stood I could see for miles all round. There was not a single house, or tree, or human being in sight. There was just myself on the top of a moor; the bigness of it gave me a regular scare. I suppose

I had got used to walls : I had got used to feeling that if I went straight ahead without stopping I should knock against something That somehow made me feel safe. Out on that great moor—just as if I were the last man left alive in the world—I do not feel safe. I find the track and get home again, and I tremble like a half-drowned kitten until I see a wall again, or somebody with a surly face who does not answer civilly when I speak to him. All these feelings will wear off, no doubt, and I shall be able to enter upon the new phase of my existence without any discomfort. But I was quite right to take a few months quiet retirement. One must get used to things gradually. It was the same with the champagne—to which, by the way, I had not meant to allude any further.

June 20th.—It is remarkable what a fascination these very large moors have for me. It is not exactly fear any more—indeed, it must be the reverse. I do not care to be anywhere else. Instead of making this a mere pause between two different existences, I shall continue it. To that I have quite made up my mind. When I am out there in a place where I cannot see any trees, or houses, or living things, I am the last person left alive in the world. I am a kind of a god. There is nobody to think anything at all about me, and it does not matter if my clothes are not right, or if I drop an “h”—which I rarely do except when speaking very quickly. I never knew what real independence was before. There have been too many houses

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around, and too many people looking on. It seems to me now such a common and despicable thing to live among people, and to have one's character and one's ways altered by what they are going to think. I know now that when I ordered that bottle of champagne I did it far more to please the waiter and to make him think well of me than to please myself. I pity the kind of creature that I was then, but I had not known the open country at that time. It is a grand education. If Toller were to come in now I should say, "Go away. Go back to your bricks and mortar, and account-books, and swell friends, and white waistcoats, and rubbish of that kind. You cannot possibly understand me, and your presence irritates me. If you do not go at once I will have the dog let loose upon you." By the way, that was a curious thing which happened the other day. I feed the dog, a mastiff, regularly, and it goes out with me. We had walked some way, and had reached that spot where a man becomes the last man alive in the world. Suddenly the dog began to howl, and ran off home with its tail between its legs, as if it were frightened of something. What was it that the dog had seen and I had not seen? A ghost? In broad daylight? Well, if the dead come back they might walk here without contamination. A few sheep, a sweep of heather, a grey sky, but nothing that a living man planted or built. They could be alone here. If it were not that it would seem a kind of blasphemy, I would buy a piece of land in the very middle of the

loneliest moor and build myself a cottage there.

June 23rd.—I received a letter to-day from Julia. Of course she does not understand the change which has taken place in me. She writes as she always used to write, and I find it very hard to remember and realize that I liked it once, and was glad when I got a letter from her. That was before I got into the habit of going into empty places alone. The old clerking, account-book life has become too small to care about. The swell life of the private gentleman, to which I looked forward, is also not worth considering. As for Julia, I was to have married her ; I used to kiss her. She wrote to say that she thought a great deal of me ; she still writes. I don't want her. I don't want anything. I have become the last man alive in the world. I shall leave this farm-house very soon. The people are all right, but they are *people*, and therefore insufferable. I can no longer live or breathe in a place where I see people, or trees which people have planted, or houses which people have built. It is an ugly word—people.

July 7th.—I was wrong in saying that I was the last man alive in the world. I believe I am dead. I know now why the mastiff howled and ran away. The whole moor is full of them ; one sees them after a time when one has got used to the open country—or perhaps it is because one is dead. Now I see them by moonlight and sunlight, and I am not frightened at all. I think I must be dead, because there

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seems to be a line ruled straight through my life, and the things which happened on the further side of the line are not real. I look over this diary, and see some references to a Mr. Toller, and to some champagne, and coming into money. I cannot for the life of me think what it is all about. I suppose the incidents described really happened, unless I was mad when I wrote about them. I suppose that I am not dead, since I can write in a book, and eat food, and walk, and sleep and wake again. But since I see them now—these people that fill up the lonely places—I must be quite different to ordinary human beings. If I am not dead, then what am I? To-day I came across an old letter signed “Julia Jarvis”; the envelope was addressed to me. I wonder who on earth she was?

July 9th.—A man in a frock-coat came to see me, and talked about my best interest. He wanted me, so far as I could gather, to come away with him somewhere. He said I was all right, or, at any rate, would become all right, with a little care. He would not go away until I said that I would kill him. Then the woman at the farm-house came up with a white face, and I said I would kill her too. I positively cannot endure people. I am something apart, something different. I am not alive, and I am not dead. I cannot imagine what I am.

July 16th.—I have settled the whole thing to my complete satisfaction. I can without doubt believe the evidence of my own senses. I have seen, and I have heard. I know now

that I am a god. I had almost thought before that this might be. What was the matter was that I was too diffident : I had no self-confidence ; I had never heard before of any man, even a clerk in an old-established firm, who had become a god. I therefore supposed it was impossible until it was distinctly proved to be.

I had often made up my mind to go to that range of hills that lies to the north. They are purple when one sees them far off. At nearer view they are grey, then they become green, then one sees a silver network over the green. The silver network is made by streams descending in the sunlight. I climbed the hill slowly ; the air was still, and the heat was terrible. Even the water which I drank from the running stream seemed flat and warm. As I climbed, the storm broke. I took but little notice of it, for the dead that I had met below on the moor had told me that lightning could not touch me. At the top of the hill I turned, and saw the storm raging beneath my feet. It is the greatest of mercies that I went there, for that is where the other gods gather, at such times as the lightning plays between them and the earth, and the black thunder-clouds, hanging low, shut them out from the sight of men.

Some of the gods were rather like the big pictures that I have seen on the hoardings advertising plays at the theatre, or some food which is supposed to give great strength and muscular development. They were handsome in face, and without any expression. They

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never seemed to be angry or pleased, or hurt. They sat there in great long rows, resting, with the storm raging in between them and the earth. One of them was a woman. I spoke to her, and she told me that she was older than this earth ; yet she had the face of a young girl, and her eyes were like eyes that I have seen before somewhere. I cannot think where I saw the eyes like those of the goddess, but perhaps it was in that part of my life which is forgotten and ruled off with a line. It gave one the greatest and most majestic feelings to stand there with the gods, and to know that one was a god one's self, and that lightning did not hurt one, and that one would live for ever.

July 18th.—This afternoon the storm returned, and I hurried to the meeting-place, but it is far away to the hills, and though I climbed as quickly as I could the storm was almost passed, and they had gone.

August 1st.—I was told in my sleep that to-morrow I was to go back to the hill again, and that once more the gods would be there, and that the storm would gather round us, and would shut us from profane sight, and the steely lightnings would blind any eye that tried to look upon us. For this reason I have refused now to eat or drink anything ; I am a god and have no need of such things. It is strange that now when I see all real things so clearly and easily—the ghosts of the dead that walk across the moors in the sunlight and the concourse of the gods on the hill-top above the storm—men and women with whom I once

moved before I became a god are no more to me than so many black shadows. I scarcely know one from the other, only that the presence of a black shadow anywhere near me makes me angry, and I desire to kill it. That will pass away; it is probably some faint relic of the thing that I once was in the other side of my life on the other side of the line which has been ruled across it. Seeing that I am a god it is not natural that I can feel anger or joy any more. Already all feeling of joy has gone from me, for to-morrow, so I was told in my sleep, I am to be betrothed to the beautiful goddess that is older than the world, and yet looks like a young girl, and she is to give me a sprig of heather as a token and——

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It was on the evening of August 1 he was found.

THE UNDYING THING

CHAPTER I

UP and down the oak-panelled dining-hall of Mansteth the master of the house walked restlessly. At formal intervals down the long severe table were placed four silver candlesticks, but the light from these did not serve to illuminate the whole of the surroundings. It just touched the portrait of a fair-haired boy with a sad and wistful expression that hung at one end of the room ; it sparkled on the lid of a silver tankard. As Sir Edric passed to and fro it lit up his face and figure. It was a bold and resolute face with a firm chin and passionate, dominant eyes. A bad past was written in the lines of it. And yet every now and then there came over it a strange look of very anxious gentleness that gave it some resemblance to the portrait of the fair-haired boy. Sir Edric paused a moment before the portrait and surveyed it carefully, his strong brown hands locked behind him, his gigantic shoulders thrust a little forward.

“ Ah, what I was ! ” he murmured to himself — “ what I was ! ”

Once more he commenced pacing up and down. The candles, mirrored in the polished

wood of the table, had burnt low. For hours Sir Edric had been waiting, listening intently for some sound from the room above or from the broad staircase outside. There had been sounds—the wailing of a woman, a quick abrupt voice, the moving of rapid feet. But for the last hour he had heard nothing. Quite suddenly he stopped and dropped on his knees against the table :

“ God, I have never thought of Thee. Thou knowest that—Thou knowest that by my devilish behaviour and cruelty I did veritably murder Alice, my first wife, albeit the physicians did maintain that she died of a decline—a wasting sickness. Thou knowest that all here in Mansteth do hate me, and that rightly. They say, too, that I am mad ; but that they say not rightly, seeing that I know how wicked I am. I always knew it, but I never cared until I loved—oh, God, I never cared ! ”

His fierce eyes opened for a minute, glared round the room, and closed again tightly. He went on :

“ God, for myself I ask nothing ; I make no bargaining with Thee. Whatsoever punishment Thou givest me to bear I will bear it ; whatsoever Thou givest me to do I will do it. Whether Thou killest Eve or whether Thou keepest her in life—and never have I loved but her—I will from this night be good. In due penitence will I receive the holy Sacrament of Thy Body and Blood. And my son, the one child that I had by Alice, I will fetch back again from Challonsea where I kept him in

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order that I might not look upon him, and I will be to him a father in deed and very truth. And in all things, so far as in me lieth, I will make restitution and atonement. Whether Thou hearest me or whether Thou hearest me not, these things shall be. And for my prayer, it is but this: of Thy loving kindness, most merciful God, be Thou with Eve and make her happy; and after these great pains and perils of childbirth send her Thy peace. Of Thy loving-kindness, Thy merciful loving-kindness, O God!"

Perhaps the prayer that is offered when the time for praying is over is more terribly pathetic than any other. Yet one might hesitate to say that this prayer was unanswered.

Sir Edric rose to his feet. Once more he paced the room. There was a strange simplicity about him, the simplicity that scorns an incongruity. He felt that his lips and throat were parched and dry. He lifted the heavy silver tankard from the table and raised the lid; there was still a good draught of mulled wine in it with the burnt toast, cut heart-shape, floating on the top.

"To the health of Eve and her child," he said aloud, and drained it to the last drop.

Click, click! As he put the tankard down he heard distinctly two doors opened and shut quickly, one after the other. And then slowly down the stairs came a hesitating step. Sir Edric could bear the suspense no longer. He opened the dining-room door, and the dim light strayed out into the dark hall beyond.

"Dennison," he said, in a low, sharp whisper "is that you?"

"Yes, yes. I am coming, Sir Edric."

A moment afterwards Dr. Dennison entered the room. He was very pale; perspiration streamed from his forehead; his cravat was disarranged. He was an old man, thin, with the air of proud humility. Sir Edric watched him narrowly.

"Then she is dead," he said, with a quiet that Dr. Dennison had not expected.

"Twenty physicians—a hundred physicians could not have saved her, Sir Edric. She was——" He gave some details of medical interest.

"Dennison," said Sir Edric, still speaking with calm and restraint, "why do you seem thus indisposed and panic-stricken? You are a physician; have you never looked upon the face of death before? The soul of my wife is with God——"

"Yes," murmured Dennison, "a good woman, a perfect, saintly woman."

"And," Sir Edric went on, raising his eyes to the ceiling as though he could see through it, "her body lies in great dignity and beauty upon the bed, and there is no horror in it. Why are you afraid?"

"I do not fear death, Sir Edric."

"But your hands—they are not steady. You are evidently overcome. Does the child live?"

"Yes, it lives."

"Another boy—a brother for young Edric, the child that Alice bore me?"

THE UNDYING THING

"There—there is something wrong. I do not know what to do. I want you to come upstairs. And, Sir Edric, I must tell you, you will need your self-command."

"Dennison, the hand of God is heavy upon me; but from this time forth until the day of my death I am submissive to it, and God send that that day may come quickly! I will follow you and I will endure."

He took one of the high silver candlesticks from the table and stepped towards the door. He strode quickly up the staircase, Dr. Dennison following a little way behind him.

As Sir Edric waited at the top of the staircase he heard suddenly from the room before him a low cry. He put down the candlestick on the floor and leaned back against the wall listening. The cry came again, a vibrating monotone ending in a growl.

"Dennison, Dennison!"

His voice choked; he could not go on.

"Yes," said the doctor, "it is in there. I had the two women out of the room, and got it here. No one but myself has seen it. But you must see it, too."

He raised the candle and the two men entered the room—one of the spare bedrooms. On the bed there was something moving under cover of a blanket. Dr. Dennison paused for a moment and then flung the blanket partially back.

They did not remain in the room for more than a few seconds. The moment they got outside, Dr. Dennison began to speak.

“Sir Edric, I would fain suggest somewhat to you. There is no evil, as Sophocles hath it in his ‘Antigone,’ for which man hath not found a remedy, except it be death, and here——”

Sir Edric interrupted him in a husky voice.

“Downstairs, Dennison. This is too near.”

It was, indeed, passing strange. When once the novelty of this—this occurrence had worn off, Dr. Dennison seemed no longer frightened. He was calm, academic, interested in an unusual phenomenon. But Sir Edric, who was said in the village to fear nothing in earth, or heaven, or hell, was obviously much moved.

When they had got back to the dining-room, Sir Edric motioned the doctor to a seat.

“Now, then,” he said, “I will hear you. Something must be done—and to-night.”

“Exceptional cases,” said Dr. Dennison, “demand exceptional remedies. Well, it lies there upstairs and is at our mercy. We can let it live, or, placing one hand over the mouth and nostrils, we can——”

“Stop,” said Sir Edric. “This thing has so crushed and humiliated me that I can scarcely think. But I recall that while I waited for you I fell upon my knees and prayed that God would save Eve. And, as I confessed unto Him more than I will ever confess unto man, it seemed to me that it were ignoble to offer a price for His favour. And I said that whatsoever punishment I had to bear, I would bear it; and whatsoever He called upon me to do, I would do it; and I made no conditions.”

THE UNDYING THING

“ Well ? ”

“ Now my punishment is of two kinds. Firstly, my wife, Eve, is dead. And this I bear more easily because I know that now she is numbered with the company of God’s saints, and with them her pure spirit finds happier communion than with me ; I was not worthy of her. And yet she would call my roughness by gentle, pretty names. She gloried, Dennison, in the mere strength of my body, and in the greatness of my stature. And I am thankful that she never saw this—this shame that has come upon the house. For she was a proud woman, with all her gentleness, even as I was proud and bad until it pleased God this night to break me even to the dust. And for my second punishment, that, too, I must bear. This thing that lies upstairs, I will take and rear ; it is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh ; only, if it be possible, I will hide my shame so that no man but you shall know of it.”

“ This is not possible. You cannot keep a living being in this house unless it be known. Will not these women say, ‘ Where is the child ? ’ ”

Sir Edric stood upright, his powerful hands linked before him, his face working in agony ; but he was still resolute.

“ Then if it must be known, it shall be known. The fault is mine. If I had but done sooner what Eve asked, this would not have happened. I will bear it.”

“ Sir Edric, do not be angry with me, for if I did not say this, then I should be but an

COLLECTED TALES

ill counsellor. And, firstly, do not use the word shame. The ways of nature are past all explaining ; if a woman be frail and easily impressed, and other circumstances concur, then in some few rare cases a thing of this sort does happen. If there be shame, it is not upon you but upon nature—to whom one would not lightly impute shame. Yet it is true that common and uninformed people might think that this shame was yours. And herein lies the great trouble—the shame would rest also on her memory.”

“Then,” said Sir Edric, in a low, unfaltering voice, “this night for the sake of Eve I will break my word, and lose my own soul eternally.”

About an hour afterwards Sir Edric and Dr. Dennison left the house together. The doctor carried a stable lantern in his hand. Sir Edric bore in his arms something wrapped in a blanket. They went through the long garden, out into the orchard that skirts the north side of the park, and then across a field to a small dark plantation known as Hal’s Planting. In the very heart of Hal’s Planting there are some curious caves : access to the innermost chamber of them is exceedingly difficult and dangerous, and only possible to a climber of exceptional skill and courage. As they returned from these caves, Sir Edric no longer carried his burden. The dawn was breaking and the birds began to sing.

“Could not they be quiet just for this morning ?” said Sir Edric wearily.

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There were but few people who were asked to attend the funeral of Lady Vanquerest and of the baby which, it was said, had only survived her by a few hours. There were but three people who knew that only one body—the body of Lady Vanquerest—was really interred on that occasion. These three were Sir Edric Vanquerest, Dr. Dennison, and a nurse whom it had been found expedient to take into their confidence.

During the next six years Sir Edric lived, almost in solitude, a life of great sanctity, devoting much of his time to the education of the younger Edric, the child that he had by his first wife. In the course of this time some strange stories began to be told and believed in the neighbourhood with reference to Hal's Planting, and the place was generally avoided.

When Sir Edric lay on his death-bed the windows of the chamber were open, and suddenly through them came a low cry. The doctor in attendance hardly regarded it, supposing that it came from one of the owls in the trees outside. But Sir Edric, at the sound of it, rose right up in bed before anyone could stay him, and flinging up his arms cried, "Wolves ! wolves ! wolves !" Then he fell forward on his face, dead.

And four generations passed away.

CHAPTER II

TOWARDS the latter end of the nineteenth century, John Marsh, who was the oldest man in the village of Mansteth, could be prevailed upon to state what he recollected. His two sons supported him in his old age; he never felt the pinch of poverty, and he always had money in his pocket; but it was a settled principle with him that he would not pay for the pint of beer which he drank occasionally in the parlour of The Stag. Sometimes Farmer Wynthwaite paid for the beer; sometimes it was Mr. Spicer from the post-office; sometimes the landlord of The Stag himself would finance the old man's evening dissipation. In return, John Marsh was prevailed upon to state what he recollected; this he would do with great heartiness and strict impartiality, recalling the intemperance of a former Wynthwaite and the dishonesty of some ancestral Spicer while he drank the beer of their direct descendants. He would tell you, with two tough old fingers crooked round the handle of the pewter that you had provided, how your grandfather was a poor thing "fit for nowt but to brak steeans by ta rord-side." He was so disrespectful that it was believed that he spoke truth. He was particularly disrespectful when he spoke of that most devilish family, the Vanquerests; and he never tired of recounting the stories that from

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generation to generation had grown up about them. It would be objected, sometimes, that the present Sir Edric, the last surviving member of the race, was a pleasant-spoken young man, with none of the family wildness and hot temper. It was for no sin of his that Hal's Planting was haunted—a thing which every one in Mansteth, and many beyond it, most devoutly believed. John Marsh would hear no apology for him, nor for any of his ancestors; he recounted the prophecy that an old mad woman had made of the family before her strange death, and hoped, fervently, that he might live to see it fulfilled.

The third baronet, as has already been told, had lived the latter part of his life, after his second wife's death, in peace and quietness. Of him John Marsh remembered nothing, of course, and could only recall the few fragments of information that had been handed down to him. He had been told that this Sir Edric, who had travelled a good deal, at one time kept wolves, intending to train them to serve as dogs; these wolves were not kept under proper restraint, and became a kind of terror to the neighbourhood. Lady Vanquerest, his second wife, had asked him frequently to destroy these beasts; but Sir Edric, although it was said that he loved his second wife even more than he hated the first, was obstinate when any of his whims were crossed, and put her off with promises. Then one day Lady Vanquerest herself was attacked by the wolves; she was not bitten, but she was badly frightened.

That filled Sir Edric with remorse, and, when it was too late, he went out into the yard where the wolves were kept and shot them all. A few months afterwards Lady Vanquereſt died in child-birth. It was a queer thing, John Marsh noted, that it was juſt at this time that Hal's Planting began to get ſuch a bad name. The fourth baronet was, John Marsh conſidered, the worſt of the race ; it was to him that the old mad woman had made her prophecy, an incident that Marsh himſelf had witneſſed in his childhood and ſtill vividly remembered.

The baronet, in his old age, had been caſt up by his vices on the ſhores of melancholy ; heavy-eyed, grey-haired, bent, he ſeemed to paſs through life as in a dream. Every day he would go out on horſeback, always at a walking pace, as though he were following the funeral of his paſt ſelf. One night he was riding up the village ſtreet as this old woman came down it. Her name was Ann Ruthers ; ſhe had a kind of reputation in the village, and although all ſaid that ſhe was mad, many of her utterances were remembered, and ſhe was treated with reſpect. It was growing dark, and the village ſtreet was almoſt empty ; but juſt at the lower end was the uſual group of men by the door of The Stag, dimly illuminated by the light that came through the quaint windows of the old inn. They glanced at Sir Edric as he rode ſlowly paſt them, taking no notice of their reſpectful ſalutes. At the upper end of the ſtreet there were two perſons. One was Ann Ruthers, a tall, gaunt old woman,

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her head wrapped in a shawl ; the other was John Marsh. He was then a boy of eight, and he was feeling somewhat frightened. He had been on an expedition to a distant and foetid pond, and in the black mud and clay about its borders he had discovered live newts ; he had three of them in his pocket, and this was to some extent a joy to him, but his joy was damped by his knowledge that he was coming home much too late, and would probably be chastised in consequence. He was unable to walk fast or to run, because Ann Ruthers was immediately in front of him, and he dared not pass her, especially at night. She walked on until she met Sir Edric, and then, standing still, she called him by name. He pulled in his horse and raised his heavy eyes to look at her. Then in loud clear tones she spoke to him, and John Marsh heard and remembered every word that she said ; it was her prophecy of the end of the Vanquerests. Sir Edric never answered a word. When she had finished, he rode on, while she remained standing there, her eyes fixed on the stars above her. John Marsh dared not pass the mad woman ; he turned round and walked back, keeping close to Sir Edric's horse. Quite suddenly, without a word of warning, as if in a moment of ungovernable irritation, Sir Edric wheeled his horse round and struck the boy across the face with his switch.

On the following morning John Marsh—or rather, his parents—received a handsome solatium in coin of the realm ; but sixty-five

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years afterwards he had not forgiven that blow, and still spoke of the Vanquerests as a most devilish family, still hoped and prayed that he might see the prophecy fulfilled. He would relate, too, the death of Ann Ruthers, which occurred either later on the night of her prophecy or early on the following day. She would often roam about the country all night, and on this particular night she left the main road to wander over the Vanquerest lands, where trespassers, especially at night, were not welcomed. But no one saw her, and it seemed that she had made her way to a part where no one was likely to see her; for none of the keepers would have entered Hal's Planting by night. Her body was found there at noon on the following day, lying under the tall bracken, dead, but without any mark of violence upon it. It was considered that she had died in a fit. This naturally added to the ill-repute of Hal's Planting. The woman's death caused considerable sensation in the village. Sir Edric sent a messenger to the married sister with whom she had lived, saying that he wished to pay all the funeral expenses. This offer, as John Marsh recalled with satisfaction, was refused.

Of the last two baronets he had but little to tell. The fifth baronet was credited with the family temper, but he conducted himself in a perfectly conventional way, and did not seem in the least to belong to romance. He was a good man of business, and devoted himself to making up, as far as he could, for the very

extravagant expenditure of his predecessors. His son, the present Sir Edric, was a fine young fellow and popular in the village. Even John Marsh could find nothing to say against him ; other people in the village were interested in him. It was said that he had chosen a wife in London—a Miss Guerdon—and would shortly be back to see that Mansteth Hall was put in proper order for her before his marriage at the close of the season. Modernity kills ghostly romance. It was difficult to associate this modern and handsome Sir Edric, bright and spirited, a good sportsman and a good fellow, with the doom that had been foretold for the Vanquerest family. He himself knew the tradition and laughed at it. He wore clothes made by a London tailor, looked healthy, smiled cheerfully, and, in a vain attempt to shame his own headkeeper, had himself spent a night alone in Hal's Planting. This last was used by Mr. Spicer in argument, who would ask John Marsh what he made of it. John Marsh replied contemptuously that it was "nowt." It was not so that the Vanquerest family was to end ; but when the thing, whatever it was, that lived in Hal's Planting, left it and came up to the house, to Mansteth Hall itself, then one would see the end of the Vanquerests. So Ann Ruthers had prophesied. Sometimes Mr. Spicer would ask the pertinent question, how did John Marsh know that there really was anything in Hal's Planting ? This he asked, less because he disbelieved, than because he wished to draw forth an account of John's

personal experiences. These were given in great detail, but they did not amount to very much. One night John Marsh had been taken by business—Sir Edric's keepers would have called the business by hard names—into the neighbourhood of Hal's Planting. He had there been suddenly startled by a cry, and had run away as though he were running for his life. That was all he could tell about the cry—it was the kind of cry to make a man lose his head and run. And then it always happened that John Marsh was urged by his companions to enter Hal's Planting himself, and discover what was there. John pursed his thin lips together, and hinted that that also might be done one of these days. Whereupon Mr. Spicer looked across his pipe to Farmer Wynthwaite and smiled significantly.

Shortly before Sir Edric's return from London, the attention of Mansteth was once more directed to Hal's Planting, but not by any supernatural occurrence. Quite suddenly, on a calm day, two trees there fell with a crash; there were caves in the centre of the plantation, and it seemed as if the roof of some big chamber in these caves had given way.

They talked it over one night in the parlour of The Stag. There was water in these caves, Farmer Wynthwaite knew it; and he expected a further subsidence. If the whole thing collapsed, what then?

"Ay," said John Marsh. He rose from his chair, and pointed in the direction of the Hall with his thumb. "What then?"

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He walked across to the fire, looked at it meditatively for a moment, and then spat in it.

“A trewly wun’ful owd mon,” said Farmer Wynthwaite as he watched him.

CHAPTER III

IN the smoking-room at Mansteth Hall sat Sir Edric with his friend and intended brother-in-law, Dr. Andrew Guerdon. Both men were on the verge of middle-age ; there was hardly a year's difference between them. Yet Guerdon looked much the older man ; that was, perhaps, because he wore a short, black beard, while Sir Edric was clean shaven. Guerdon was thought to be an enviable man. His father had made a fortune in the firm of Guerdon, Guerdon and Bird ; the old style was still retained at the bank, although there was no longer a Guerdon in the firm. Andrew Guerdon had a handsome allowance from his father, and had also inherited money through his mother. He had taken the degree of Doctor of Medicine ; he did not practise, but he was still interested in science, especially in out-of-the-way science. He was unmarried, gifted with perpetually good health, interested in life, popular. His friendship with Sir Edric dated from their college days. It had for some years been almost certain that Sir Edric would marry his friend's sister, Ray Guerdon, although the actual betrothal had only been announced that season.

On a bureau in one corner of the room were spread a couple of plans and various slips of paper. Sir Edric was wrinkling his brows over them, dropping cigar-ash over them, and

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finally getting angry over them. He pushed back his chair irritably, and turned towards Guerdon.

“Look here, old man!” he said. “I desire to curse the original architect of this house—to curse him in his down-sitting and his uprising.”

“Seeing that the original architect has gone to where beyond these voices there is peace, he won’t be offended. Neither shall I. But why worry yourself? You’ve been rooted to that blessed bureau all day, and now, after dinner, when every self-respecting man chucks business, you return to it again—even as a sow returns to her wallowing in the mire.”

“Now, my good Andrew, do be reasonable. How on earth can I bring Ray to such a place as this? And it’s built with such ingrained malice and vexatiousness that one can’t live in it as it is, and can’t alter it without having the whole shanty tumble down about one’s ears. Look at this plan now. That thing’s what they’re pleased to call a morning room. If the window had been *here* there would have been an uninterrupted view of open country. So what does this forsaken fool of an architect do? He sticks it *there*, where you see it on the plan, looking straight on to a blank wall with a stable yard on the other side of it. But that’s a trifle. Look here again——”

“I won’t look any more. This place is all right. It was good enough for your father and mother and several generations before them until you arose to improve the world; it was

good enough for you until you started to get married. It's a picturesque place, and if you begin to alter it you'll spoil it." Guerdon looked round the room critically. "Upon my word," he said, "I don't know of any house where I like the smoking-room as well as I like this. It's not too big, and yet it's fairly lofty ; it's got those comfortable-looking oak-panelled walls. That's the right kind of fireplace, too, and these corner cupboards are handy."

"Of course this won't *remain* the smoking-room. It has the morning sun, and Ray likes that, so I shall make it into her boudoir. It *is* a nice room, as you say."

"That's it, Ted, my boy," said Guerdon bitterly ; "take a room which is designed by nature and art to be a smoking-room and turn it into a boudoir. Turn it into the very deuce of a boudoir with the morning sun laid on for ever and ever. Waste the twelfth of August by getting married on it. Spend the winter in foreign parts, and write letters that you can breakfast out of doors, just as if you'd created the mildness of the climate yourself. Come back in the spring and spend the London season in the country in order to avoid seeing anybody who wants to see you. That's the way to do it ; that's the way to get yourself generally loved and admired !"

"That's chiefly imagination," said Sir Edric. "I'm blest if I can see why I should not make this house fit for Ray to live in."

"It's a queer thing : Ray was a good girl, and you weren't a bad sort yourself. You

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prepare to go into partnership, and you both straightway turn into despicable lunatics. I'll have a word or two with Ray. But I'm serious about this house. Don't go tinkering it; it's got a character of its own, and you'd better leave it. Turn half Tottenham Court Road and the culture thereof—Heaven help it!—into your town house if you like, but leave this alone."

"Haven't got a town house—yet. Anyway I'm not going to be unsuitable; I'm not going to feel myself at the mercy of a big firm. I shall supervise the whole thing myself. I shall drive over to Challonsea to-morrow afternoon and see if I can't find some intelligent and fairly conscientious workmen."

"That's all right; you supervise them and I'll supervise you. You'll be much too new if I don't look after you. You've got an old legend, I believe, that the family's coming to a bad end; you must be consistent with it. As you are bad, be beautiful. By the way, what do you yourself think of the legend?"

"It's nothing," said Sir Edric, speaking, however, rather seriously. "They say that Hal's Planting is haunted by something that will not die. Certainly an old woman, who for some godless reason of her own made her way there by night, was found there dead on the following morning; but her death could be, and was, accounted for by natural causes. Certainly, too, I haven't a man in my employ who'll go there by night now."

"Why not?"

"How should I know? I fancy that a few

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of the villagers sit boozing at The Stag in the evening, and like to scare themselves by swopping lies about Hal's Planting. I've done my best to stop it. I once, as you know, took a rug, a revolver and a flask of whisky and spent the night there myself. But even that didn't convince them."

"Yes, you told me. By the way, did you hear or see anything?"

Sir Edric hesitated before he answered. Finally he said:

"Look here, old man I wouldn't tell this to anyone but yourself. I did think that I heard something. About the middle of the night I was awakened by a cry; I can only say that it was the kind of cry that frightened me. I sat up, and at that moment I heard some great, heavy thing go swishing through the bracken behind me at a great rate. Then all was still; I looked about, but I could find nothing. At last I argued as I would argue now that a man who is just awake is only half awake, and that his powers of observation, by hearing or any other sense, are not to be trusted. I even persuaded myself to go to sleep again, and there was no more disturbance. However, there's a real danger there now. In the heart of the plantation there are some caves and a subterranean spring; lately there has been some slight subsidence there, and the same sort of thing will happen again in all probability. I wired to-day to an expert to come and look at the place; he has replied that he will come on Monday. The legend says that

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when the thing that lives in Hal's Planting comes up to the hall the Vanquerests will be ended. If I cut down the trees and then break up the place with a charge of dynamite I shouldn't wonder if I spoiled that legend."

Guerdon smiled.

"I'm inclined to agree with you all through. It's absurd to trust the immediate impressions of a man just awakened; what you heard was probably a stray cow."

"No cow," said Sir Edric impartially. "There's a low wall all round the place—not much of a wall, but too much for a cow."

"Well, something else—some equally obvious explanation. In dealing with such questions, never forget that you're in the nineteenth century. By the way, your man's coming on Monday. That reminds me to-day's Friday, and as an indisputable consequence to-morrow's Saturday, therefore, if you want to find your intelligent workmen it will be of no use to go in the afternoon."

"True," said Sir Edric, "I'll go in the morning." He walked to a tray on a side table and poured a little whisky into a tumbler. "They don't seem to have brought any seltzer water," he remarked in a grumbling voice.

He rang the bell impatiently.

"Now why don't you use those corner cupboards for that kind of thing? If you kept a supply there, it would be handy in case of accidents."

"They're full up already."

He opened one of them and showed that

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it was filled with old account-books and yellow documents tied up in bundles. The servant entered.

"Oh, I say, there isn't any seltzer. Bring it, please."

He turned again to Guerdon.

"You might do me a favour when I'm away to-morrow, if there's nothing else that you want to do. I wish you'd look through all these papers for me. They're all old. Possibly some of them ought to go to my solicitor, and I know that a lot of them ought to be destroyed. Some few may be of family interest. It's not the kind of thing that I could ask a stranger or a servant to do for me, and I've so much on hand just now before my marriage——"

"But of course, my dear fellow, I'll do it with pleasure."

"I'm ashamed to give you all this bother. However, you said that you were coming here to help me, and I take you at your word. By the way, I think you'd better not say anything to Ray about the Hal's Planting story."

"I may be some of the things that you take me for, but really I am not a common ass. Of course I shouldn't tell her."

"I'll tell her myself, and I'd sooner do it when I've got the whole thing cleared up. Well, I'm really obliged to you."

"I needn't remind you that I hope to receive as much again. I believe in compensation. Nature always gives it and always requires it. One finds it everywhere, in philology and onwards."

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"I could mention omissions."

"They are few, and make a belief in a hereafter to supply them logical."

"Lunatics, for instance?"

"Their delusions are often their compensation. They argue correctly from false premises. A lunatic believing himself to be a millionaire has as much delight as money can give."

"How about deformities or monstrosities?"

"The principle is there, although I don't pretend that the compensation is always adequate. A man who is deprived of one sense generally has another developed with unusual acuteness. As for monstrosities of at all a human type one sees none; the things exhibited in fairs are, almost without exception, frauds. They occur rarely, and one does not know enough about them. A really good text-book on the subject would be interesting. Still, such stories as I have heard would bear out my theory—stories of their superhuman strength and cunning, and of the extraordinary prolongation of life that has been noted, or is said to have been noted, in them. But it is hardly fair to test my principle by exceptional cases. Besides, anyone can prove anything except that anything's worth proving."

"That's a cheerful thing to say. I wouldn't like to swear that I could prove how the Hal's Planting legend started; but I fancy, do you know, that I could make a very good shot at it."

"Well?"

"My great-grandfather kept wolves—I can't

say why. Do you remember the portrait of him?—not the one when he was a boy, the other. It hangs on the staircase. There's now a group of wolves in one corner of the picture. I was looking carefully at the picture one day and thought that I detected some over-painting in that corner; indeed, it was done so roughly that a child would have noticed it if the picture had been hung in a better light. I had the over-painting removed by a good man, and underneath there was that group of wolves depicted. Well, one of these wolves must have escaped, got into Hal's Planting, and scared an old woman or two; that would start a story, and human mendacity would do the rest."

"Yes," said Guerdon meditatively, "that doesn't sound improbable. But why did your great-grandfather have the wolves painted out?"

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CHAPTER IV

SATURDAY morning was fine, but very hot and sultry. After breakfast, when Sir Edric had driven off to Challonsea, Andrew Guerdon settled himself in a comfortable chair in the smoking room. The contents of the corner cupboard were piled up on a table by his side. He lit his pipe and began to go through the papers and put them in order. He had been at work about a quarter of an hour when the butler entered rather abruptly, looking pale and disturbed.

“In Sir Edric’s absence, sir, it was thought that I had better come to you for advice. There’s been an awful thing happened.”

“Well?”

“They’ve found a corpse in Hal’s Planting about half an hour ago. It’s the body of an old man, John Marsh, who used to live in the village. He seems to have died in some kind of a fit. They were bringing it here, but I had it taken down to the village where his cottage is. Then I sent to the police and to a doctor.”

There was a moment or two’s silence before Guerdon answered.

“This is a terrible thing. I don’t know of anything else that you could do. Stop; if the police want to see the spot where the body was found, I think that Sir Edric would like them to have every facility.”

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“ Quite so, sir.”

“ And no one else must be allowed there.”

“ No, sir. Thank you.”

The butler withdrew.

Guerdon arose from his chair and began to pace up and down the room.

“ What an impressive thing a coincidence is ! ” he thought to himself. “ Last night the whole of the Hal’s Planting story seemed to me not worth consideration. But this second death there—it can be only coincidence. What else could it be ? ”

The question would not leave him. What else could it be ? Had that dead man seen something there and died in sheer terror of it ? Had Sir Edric really heard something when he spent that night there alone ? He returned to his work, but he found that he got on with it but slowly. Every now and then his mind wandered back to the subject of Hal’s Planting. His doubts annoyed him. It was unscientific, and unmodern of him to feel any perplexity because a natural and rational explanation was possible ; he was annoyed with himself for being perplexed.

After luncheon he strolled round the grounds and smoked a cigar. He noticed that a thick bank of dark, slate-coloured clouds was gathering in the west. The air was very still. In a remote corner of the garden a big heap of weeds was burning ; the smoke went up perfectly straight. On the top of the heap light flames danced ; they were like the ghosts of flames in the strange light. A few big drops of

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rain fell. The small shower did not last for five seconds. Guerdon glanced at his watch. Sir Edric would be back in an hour, and he wanted to finish his work with the papers before Sir Edric's return, so he went back into the house once more.

He picked up the first document that came to hand. As he did so, another, smaller, and written on parchment, which had been folded in with it, dropped out. He began to read the parchment; it was written in faded ink, and the parchment itself was yellow and in many places stained. It was the confession of the third baronet—he could tell that by the date upon it. It told the story of that night when he and Dr. Dennison went together carrying a burden through the long garden out into the orchard that skirts the north side of the park, and then across a field to a small, dark plantation. It told how he made a vow to God and did not keep it. These were the last words of the confession:

“Already upon me has the punishment fallen, and the devil's wolves do seem to hunt me in my sleep nightly. But I know that there is worse to come. The thing that I took to Hal's Planting is dead. Yet will it come back again to the Hall, and then will the Vanquerests be at an end. This writing I have committed to chance, neither showing it nor hiding it, and leaving it to chance if any man shall read it.”

Underneath there was a line written in darker ink, and in quite a different handwriting. It

was dated fifteen years later, and the initials R.D. were appended to it :

“ It is not dead. I do not think that it will ever die.”

When Andrew Guerdon had finished reading this document, he looked slowly round the room. The subject had got on his nerves, and he was almost expecting to see something. Then he did his best to pull himself together. The first question he put to himself was this : “ Has Ted ever seen this ? ” Obviously he had not. If he had, he could not have taken the tradition of Hal’s Planting so lightly, nor have spoken of it so freely. Besides, he would either have mentioned the document to Guerdon, or he would have kept it carefully concealed. He would not have allowed him to come across it casually in that way. “ Ted must never see it,” thought Guerdon to himself. He then remembered the pile of weeds he had seen burning in the garden. He put the parchment in his pocket, and hurried out. There was no one about. He spread the parchment on the top of the pile, and waited until it was entirely consumed. Then he went back to the smoking room ; he felt easier now.

“ Yes,” thought Guerdon, “ if Ted had first of all heard of the finding of that body, and then had read that document, I believe that he would have gone mad. Things that come near us affect us deeply.”

Guerdon himself was much moved. He clung steadily to reason ; he felt himself able to give a natural explanation all through, and

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yet he was nervous. The net of coincidence had closed in around him; the mention in Sir Edric's confession of the prophecy which had subsequently become traditional in the village alarmed him. And what did that last line mean? He supposed that R.D. must be the initials of Dr. Dennison. What did he mean by saying that the thing was not dead? Did he mean that it had not really been killed, that it had been gifted with some preternatural strength and vitality and had survived, though Sir Edric did not know it? He recalled what he had said about the prolongation of the lives of such things. If it still survived, why had it never been seen? Had it joined to the wild hardness of the beast a cunning that was human—or more than human? How could it have lived? There was water in the caves, he reflected, and food could have been secured—a wild beast's food. Or did Dr. Dennison mean that though the thing itself was dead, its wraith survived and haunted the place? He wondered how the doctor had found Sir Edric's confession, and why he had written that line at the end of it. As he sat thinking, a low rumble of thunder in the distance startled him. He felt a touch of panic—a sudden impulse to leave Mansteth at once and, if possible, to take Ted with him. Ray could never live there. He went over the whole thing in his mind again and again, at one time calm and argumentative about it, and at another shaken by blind horror.

Sir Edric, on his return from Challonsea a few

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minutes afterwards, came straight to the smoking-room where Guerdon was. He looked tired and depressed. He began to speak at once :

“ You needn’t tell me about it—about John Marsh. I heard about it in the village.”

“ Did you ? It’s a painful occurrence, although, of course——”

“ Stop. Don’t go into it. Anything can be explained—I know that.”

“ I went through those papers and account-books while you were away. Most of them may just as well be destroyed ; but there are a few—I put them aside there—which might be kept. There was nothing of any interest.”

“ Thanks ; I’m much obliged to you.”

“ Oh, and look here, I’ve got an idea. I’ve been examining the plans of the house, and I’m coming round to your opinion. There are some alterations which should be made, and yet I’m afraid that they’d make the place look patched and renovated. It wouldn’t be a bad thing to know what Ray thought about it.”

“ That’s impossible. The workmen come on Monday, and we can’t consult her before then. Besides, I have a general notion what she would like.”

“ We could catch the night express to town at Challonsea, and——”

Sir Edric rose from his seat angrily and hit the table.

“ Good God ! don’t sit there hunting up excuses to cover my cowardice, and making it easy for me to bolt. What do you suppose

THE UNDYING THING

the villagers would say, and what would my own servants say, if I ran away to-night? I am a coward—I know it. I'm horribly afraid. But I'm not going to act like a coward if I can help it."

"Now, my dear chap, don't excite yourself. If you are going to care at all—to care as much as the conventional damn—for what people say, you'll have no peace in life. And I don't believe you're afraid. What are you afraid of?"

Sir Edric paced once or twice up and down the room, and then sat down again before replying.

"Look here, Andrew, I'll make a clean breast of it. I've always laughed at the tradition; I forced myself, as it seemed at least, to disprove it by spending a night in Hal's Planting; I took the pains even to make a theory which would account for its origin. All the time I had a sneaking, stifled belief in it. With the help of my reason I crushed that; but now my reason has thrown up the job, and I'm afraid. I'm afraid of the Undying Thing that is in Hal's Planting. I heard it that night. John Marsh saw it last night—they took me to see the body, and the face was awful; and I believe that one day it will come from Hal's Planting——"

"Yes," interrupted Guerdon, "I know. And at present I believe as much. Last night we laughed at the whole thing, and we shall live to laugh at it again, and be ashamed of ourselves for a couple of superstitious old women. I fancy that beliefs are affected by weather—there's thunder in the air."

“No,” said Sir Edric, “my belief has come to stay.”

“And what are you going to do?”

“I’m going to test it. On Monday I can begin to get to work, and then I’ll blow up Hal’s Planting with dynamite. After that we shan’t need to believe—we shall *know*. And now let’s dismiss the subject. Come down into the billiard-room and have a game. Until Monday I won’t think of the thing again.”

Long before dinner, Sir Edric’s depression seemed to have completely vanished. At dinner he was boisterous and amused. Afterwards he told stories and was interesting.

* * * *

It was late at night; the terrific storm that was raging outside had wakened Guerdon from sleep. Hopeless of getting to sleep again, he had arisen and dressed, and now sat in the window-seat watching the storm. He had never seen anything like it before; and every now and then the sky seemed to be torn across as if by hands of white fire. Suddenly he heard a tap at his door, and looked round. Sir Edric had already entered; he also had dressed. He spoke in a curious subdued voice.

“I thought you wouldn’t be able to sleep through this. Do you remember that I shut and fastened the dining-room window?”

“Yes, I remember it.”

“Well, come in here.”

Sir Edric led the way to his room, which was immediately over the dining-room. By leaning

THE UNDYING THING

out of window they could see that the dining-room window was open wide.

"Burglar," said Guerdon meditatively.

"No," Sir Edric answered, still speaking in a hushed voice. "It is the Undying Thing—it has come for me."

He snatched up the candle, and made towards the staircase; Guerdon caught up the loaded revolver which always lay on the table beside Sir Edric's bed and followed him. Both men ran down the staircase as though there were not another moment to lose. Sir Edric rushed at the dining-room door, opened it a little, and looked in. Then he turned to Guerdon, who was just behind him.

"Go back to your room," he said authoritatively.

"I won't," said Guerdon. "Why? What is it?"

Suddenly the corners of Sir Edric's mouth shot outward into the hideous grin of terror.

"It's there! It's there!" he gasped.

"Then I come in with you."

"Go back!"

With a sudden movement, Sir Edric thrust Guerdon away from the door, and then, quick as light, darted in, and locked the door behind him.

Guerdon bent down and listened. He heard Sir Edric say in a firm voice:

"Who are you? What are you?"

Then followed a heavy, snorting breathing, a low, vibrating growl, an awful cry, a scuffle.

Then Guerdon flung himself at the door.

COLLECTED TALES

He kicked at the lock, but it would not give way. At last he fired his revolver at it. Then he managed to force his way into the room. It was perfectly empty. Overhead he could hear footsteps; the noise had awakened the servants; they were standing, tremulous, on the upper landing.

Through the open window access to the garden was easy. Guerdon did not wait to get help; and in all probability none of the servants could have been persuaded to come with him. He climbed out alone, and, as if by some blind impulse, started to run as hard as he could in the direction of Hal's Planting. He knew that Sir Edric would be found there.

But when he got within a hundred yards of the plantation, he stopped. There had been a great flash of lightning, and he saw that it had struck one of the trees. Flames darted about the plantation as the dry bracken caught. Suddenly, in the light of another flash, he saw the whole of the trees fling their heads upwards; then came a deafening crash, and the ground slipped under him, and he was flung forward on his face. The plantation had collapsed, fallen through into the caves beneath it. Guerdon slowly regained his feet; he was surprised to find that he was unhurt. He walked on a few steps, and then fell again; this time he had fainted away.

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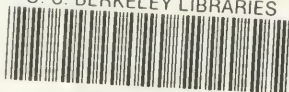
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